CONVERTING RULERS

Global Patterns, 1450–1850

ALAN STRATHERN

Converting Rulers

Why did so many rulers throughout history risk converting to a new religion brought by outsiders? In his award-winning *Unearthly Powers* (2019), Alan Strathern set out a theoretical framework for understanding the relation between religion and political authority based on a distinction between two kinds of religion – immanentism and transcendentalism – and the different ways they made monarchy sacred. This ambitious and innovative companion volume tests and substantiates this approach using case studies from Kongo (1480–1530), Japan (1560–1614), Ayutthaya (Thailand, 1660–1690) and Hawaii (1800–1830). Through in-depth analysis of key turning points in the careers of warlords, chiefs and kings, a tapestry of unique characters and stories is brought to light. However, these examples ultimately demonstrate that global patterns of conversion can be established to illuminate the religious geography of the world today.

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For
L. H. S

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is a companion to *Unearthly Powers*, which outlined a theoretical approach to understanding the historical relationship between religion and politics. The bulk of this book is comprised of four case studies that focus on the decisions of ruling figures in Kongo, Japan, Ayutthaya (Thailand) and Hawaii regarding whether or not to convert to Christianity and the implications of these decisions for the political realm.[1] For these events had abnormally consequential effects: Even where Christianity was ultimately rejected, as in Japan and Thailand, exposure to a monotheistic threat had a lasting impact on how political and religious authority was configured and how relations with the outside world were conducted. Where Christianity was accepted, as in Kongo and Hawaii, the consequences were obviously momentous.

The high politics and high stakes of these moments mean that the case studies cannot quite be considered as microhistories, and they are moreover contextualised and analysed according to a set of comparative questions. Still, they are at times rather fine-grained in focus, and as such they make for one sub-genre of global history, we might say. Meanwhile Chapter 1, summarising the theoretical framework, and Chapter 9, applying that framework to Hinduism and Confucianism, represent another genre, a return to the bird's-eye perspective of *Unearthly Powers*. Chapter 10 represents a third genre, mid-way between these two. In considering patterns of ruler conversion across the world, it is largely reliant on existing scholarship but generates interpretations that only the global perspective affords. Taken together, both books set out to help explain why the world map of religions looks the way it does.

. . .

[1] *Unearthly Powers* also began applying this theory to the question of ruler conversion in chs. 5 and 6, often drawing on early medieval European and nineteenth-century Pacific material.

This project would not have been possible without the award of a Philip Leverhulme Prize that allowed me to spend two full years (2011–2013) on research. It was during this time that the bulk of the work on Kongo, Hawaii and Japan was completed. The award of a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship in 2016–2017 allowed me to write *Unearthly Powers* and therefore crystallise the theoretical basis for the project. It also funded a research trip to Japan and the translation of Japanese sources, while the Brasenose College Research Fund enabled the translation of the remainder of the Japanese material. A Visiting Senior Research Fellowship at the Asia Research Institute in Singapore in 2016 was a most congenial context in which to pursue Southeast Asian material. The rest of the work was undertaken during sabbatical leave granted by my college and faculty over the last twelve years.

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Some of the material in Chapters 3–6 condenses work that was previously published in *Modern Asian Studies*, *The Journal of Early Modern History*, *The Journal of the Siam Society* and the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*.[2] I would also like to thank Lucy Rhymer,

[2] 'Sacred Kingship under King Narai of Ayutthaya (1656–1688): Divinization and Righteousness', *Journal of the Siam Society* (2019) 107, Part 1: 49–77; 'Tensions and Experimentations of Kingship: King Narai and His Response to Missionary Overtures in the 1680s', *Journal of the Siam Society* (2019) 107, Part 2: 17–41; 'Immanent Power and Empirical Religiosity', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (2020) 47(2): 247–78; 'The Many Meanings of Iconoclasm: Warrior and Christian Temple-shrine Destruction in Late Sixteenth Century Japan', *Journal of Early Modern History* (2020) 25(3): 163–93; 'Thailand's First Revolution? The Role of Religious Mobilization and "the People" in the Ayutthaya Rebellion of 1688', *Modern Asian Studies* (2022) 56(4): 1295–1328.

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Abbreviations

Bingham	Hiram Bingham (1849) *A Residence of Twenty-one Years in the Sandwich Islands*, 3rd ed. Hartford.
Bèze	Claude de Bèze (1947) *Mémoire du Pere de Beze sur la vie de Constance Phaulkon, premier minister du roi de Siam Phra Narai et sa triste fin*, Jean Drans and Henri Bernard, eds. Tokyo.
Cartas	*Cartas qve os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Iesus escreverão dos Reynos de Iapão & China aos da mesma Companhia da India, & Europa, des do anno de 1549 atè o de 1580*, José Manuel Garcia, ed. Maia, 1997. [Facsimile edition of the 1598 Évora edition] Vol. 1: 1549–1580; Vol. 2: 1580–1588. Where no volume is cited, Volume 1 is indicated.
Dibble	Sheldon Dibble (1843) *History of the Sandwich Islands*. Lahainaluna.
DPMAC	*Documentos Sobre os Portugueses na Moçambique e Africa Central 1497–1840*. Lisbon, 1962–1965.
Ellis	William Ellis (1832) *Polynesian Researches, During a Residence of Nearly Eight Years in the Society and Sandwich Islands, Vol. IV*. London.
Fróis	Luís Fróis (1976–1984) *Historia de Japam*, J. Wicki, ed. 5 Vols. Lisbon.
Gervaise	Nicolas Gervaise (1688) *Histoire naturelle et politique du Royaume du Siam*. Paris.
ʻĪʻī	John Papa ʻĪʻī (1959) *Fragments of Hawaiian History*, Dorothy B. Barrere and Mary Kawena Pukui, eds. Honolulu.
CWM/LMS	Council for World Mission/London Missionary Society (Archives, SOAS).

Loubère	Simon de La Loubère (1987 [1691]) *Étude historique et critique du livre de Simon de La Loubère 'Du Royaume de Siam'*, Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h, ed. Paris.
Malo	David Malo (1951) *Hawaiian Antiquities*. Honolulu.
MH	*The Missionary Herald, Containing the Proceedings of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (1821–1934).
MMA	*Monumenta Missionaria Africana: África Occidental*, António Brásio, ed. 1st series, 15 Vols. Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1952–. Note Volume I unless stated.
Pina	Rui de Pina, *Chronica del Rei D. Joham III*, in MMA. Vol. I.
PL	*The Palace Law of Ayutthaya and the Thammasat: Law and Kingship in Siam*, Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, trans. and eds. Ithaca, NY, 2016.
PMA	*Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, Luís de Albuquerque and Maria E. Madeira Santos, eds. Lisbon: Casa da Moeda, 1993–1995. Vols. 1–3, 5.
PMH	*The Panoplist and Missionary Herald* (1818–1820).
RCA	*The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, David K. Wyatt, ed., Richard D. Cushman, trans., 2nd ed. Bangkok, 2000.
Ship	Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim Muhammad Rabi (1972) *The Ship of Sulaiman*, translated from the Persian by John O'Kane. London.
Tachard	Guy Tachard (1686) *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites Envoyez par le Roy aux Indes & à la Chine: avec leurs Observations, Astronomiques, et leurs Remarques de Physique, de Géographie, d'Hydrographie, & d'Histoire*. Paris.
UP	Alan Strathern (2019) *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History*. Cambridge.
ZTHOS	*Zōho teisei Hennen Ōtomo shiryō*, Manabu Takita, ed. 33 Vols. Ōita, 1962–1971.

PART I

Concepts

Introduction

'A few years back, this people would have refrained, with superstitious horror and dread, from the infringement of a single Taboo ceremony, and never approached their *morais* or temples except with feelings of mingled terror and veneration. They now entertain sentiments as strong the other way, and despise the very idols which they till lately had adored ... It may be fairly questioned whether a similar change might not be brought about, by the operation of similar causes, in other Pagan countries, – namely, a despotic monarch's will! How feeble must be the tie where the ceremonial and not the doctrine constitutes the essential point of religious obligation!'[1]

This is the comment of a very young man, staying in Hawaii less than two months of 1822, which seems to mingle naïve Christian hope and rank prejudice. Yet Gilbert Farquhar Mathison, en route to the opium trade in China, could not have known that so many Pacific chiefs would prove him right, converting one after the other. Tahiti, it is true, had already fallen to the new faith from 1812, while in Hawaii itself, Mathison was here able to observe the effects of the remarkable abandonment of the traditional cultic system in 1819. But it was not until 1825 that the baptism of the high chiefs of Hawaii was achieved. Hawaii was followed by crucial chiefly conversions in Tonga (1830–1831), Samoa (1832) and Fiji (1854), all of them issuing in mass conversions among the broader populace. More remarkable than Mathison's fortunate prediction is that his explanation for it touches upon something real. High chiefs and monarchs, even where they were regarded as akin to the gods, might suddenly turn their authority towards changing the very nature of the religious system that seemed to hold them in place.[2] And this seems to have been connected with the kind of thing their religious system was, a matter of ceremony (or

[1] Mathison 1825: 430–31. He was eighteen or nineteen during his visit.
[2] See *UP* 311.

ritual, as a means to obtain worldly flourishing) as opposed to a matter of doctrine (or teachings, as a means of obtaining salvation).

The first of these gestures to a type of religiosity that may be described as 'immanentism' and the second to 'transcendentalism', both of which are explained in Chapter 1. A major dynamic of world history of the past two thousand years has been the way that the former has lost ground to the latter. Thus, we live in a world dominated by the salvific religions that may by defined by the transcendentalist element at their heart: especially, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and some forms of Hinduism. And a principal mechanism by which this was accomplished was the conversion of rulers whose subjects were – however swiftly or gradually – converted in turn. After military conquest and the sheer expansion of empires, this may be the most important reason why the religious map of the world today looks the way it does.

How could this be? Everywhere in the premodern world, societies conceived of rulership as a sacred office. We might imagine, then, that rulers would always jeopardize their legitimacy if they tried to convert before their subjects had. 'Conversion' is understood here as the public announcement of a new religious commitment, most emblematically through baptism, although this was in fact just one part of a much longer process starting with mere toleration or patronage of missionaries.[3] Indeed, the most acute risks for jeopardising legitimacy tended to occur not at the point of baptism but when rulers sought to abandon the patronage and performance of the traditional rites. All this is quite intuitive: Given that we have long understood – at least since Durkheim, and in many ways long before – that religion in the premodern world was a vital means by which social groups were formed and political orders were cohered, the prospect of a ruler stepping outside the religious framework by which their subjects understood themselves and the world around them seems somehow . . . absurd.

I have already addressed this question in a companion volume, *Unearthly Powers* (*UP*), which proposed a range of conceptual tools for helping us think about religion and its relationship with politics over the long term of world history. The bulk of the present book adopts a very different kind of comparative approach by taking four case studies and analysing them in detail. The first is the conversion of

[3] *UP* 257–60.

the kings of Kongo following their encounter with the Portuguese: Nzinga a Nkuwu received baptism in 1491 and then apostatised but was followed by his son Afonso, who succeeded to the throne in 1506. This was the first major royal conversion secured by Iberians as they began their seaborne expansion and helped encourage the notion that other princes and potentates in the world beyond would follow suit. Afonso established an enduringly Christian dynasty in Central Africa, and the religion would be a significant element of the regional culture for a long time to come.

The second case is that of certain warlords in Japan in the later sixteenth century, at a time when the country was reaching the climax of the *sengoku* or 'warring states' period and such lords enjoyed substantial authority over their territories – they were referred to by the Portuguese as 'kings'. The three earliest to convert were located on the southern island of Kyushu, which was particularly open to the newly intensive commercial and cultural exchanges of the early modern period. The most important convert, indeed one of the most powerful players in Kyushu, was Ōtomo Sōrin of Bungo (1530–1587), who finally received baptism in 1578. This was the most important breakthrough for Christianity among the ruling elites of major Asian societies. Yet it is no less important to understand why these Christian daimyo only ever formed a distinct minority among their peers, and why, when the *sengoku* was drawn to a close by the unifying rulers of Japan towards the end of the century, Christianity was reprehended and then persecuted.

The third case concerns the attempts of the French court to convert King Narai of Siam (r. 1656–1688), then at the height of his power as the ruler of the large and cosmopolitan kingdom of Ayutthaya and held aloft by an elaborate system of royal ceremonialisation. The French chased his soul through a series of extravagant embassies dispatched and received in the 1680s only to find that their efforts precipitated a 'revolution' in 1688 that saw the French ejected, Christians briefly persecuted and a Buddhist order trenchantly reaffirmed.

The last case is that of Hawaii, or the Sandwich Islands as the British termed the archipelago, in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Here, the whole of the cultic system seemed designed to promote the power of the ruling chiefs, for Hawaii under the conquering leader Kamehameha was fast making the transition from chiefly competition

to paramount kingship, and its leading chiefs or *ali'i* were treated as divine beings. But when Kamehameha died in 1819, his son and successor Liholiho consigned that system to oblivion through a drunken but highly deliberate act of desecration: He broke the eating tabu by sitting to eat with women – a group of high-ranking female chiefs – during the rituals of his installation. He then ordered the destruction of the temples. The real agency here, however, belonged to the widow of the dead king: Ka'ahumanu. She considers us confidently from the front cover, painted a few years before the revolution began.[4] After the collapse of the eating tabu, Ka'ahumanu toured the islands, pulling down 'idols', and then began moving towards Christianity, culminating in her baptism in 1825. The Christianisation of Hawaii was thereby secured.[5]

The final chapter of this book moves away from these detailed investigations into a quite different genre of scholarship in order to make sense of patterns of ruler conversion across the rest of the world. Gathering together all this material, the following three factors stand out as the most consistently significant in inducing rulers to convert; they may also be thought of as stages to the extent that they often followed chronologically.[6] (1) *Religious diplomacy*. Rulers tolerate and favour Christianity because of the enticements of diplomatic advantage, military assistance and commercial profit. (2) *Accessing immanent power*. The breakthrough to a more substantial incorporation of the new cult is often connected to its perceived ability to provide supernatural assistance. (3) *Enhancing authority*. The Christianisation of the realm may then be seized upon as a means of enhancing the authority of the ruling dynasty.

These factors tended to be present regardless of the social or cultural setting. This observation does not preclude us attending to a variety of other dynamics as we move from case to case, and, indeed, two further factors, intellectual appeal and cultural glamour, are briefly considered in Chapter 1 and from time to time in the chapters. But, by itself, this model does not help us get much further in explaining global variations in the spread of the world religions. To do this, we need to return to the

[4] Painted in 1816 by Louis Choris, a German-Russian artist who accompanied the expedition of Otto von Kotzebue.

[5] The broader Pacific trends are considered in *UP* 275–80 and passim.

[6] Outlined in *UP* 256–7, this model draws on all the material analysed in both books.

question of what kind of thing 'religion' was in the societies that received proselytisers. Thus, a range of more particular questions opens up. Why is it that in some societies displays of immanent power by an incoming cult seem to threaten the pre-existing traditions more gravely than in others? Why is it that the prospect of conversion risks fundamental damage to the ruler's political legitimacy in some cases, while, in others, taking this step might even enhance their status?

It turns out that examining moments of ruler conversion allows us to turn a spotlight upon questions that are intrinsically difficult for the historian to investigate: How does religion structure political possibility, exactly – not as matter of law or explicit theory but as a sociological reality? How different are the forms that 'sacred kingship' may take? Was legitimation a significant concern for pre-modern rulers? If so, did the sensibilities of the wider population matter or only those of the ruling class and potential challengers? How able were contemporaries to articulate such matters explicitly? In turning upon such questions, the analyses offered here cast light on broader aspects of each of the societies examined, as well as forming the basis upon which the larger picture of global religious transformation may be assembled.

The Comparative Approach

A range of considerations has governed the selection of cases. In order to ensure that each one sheds light on local religious–political dynamics, they had to turn on the calculations of an essentially independent ruler endowed with genuine agency as to whether or not to convert. They were selected in order to consider two 'immanentist' regions (Kongo, Hawaii) and two with established 'transcendentalist' traditions (Japan, Thailand), while each pair contains different kinds of success and failure. Kongo (Chapter 2) is a striking success story for Christianity following surprisingly slight contact with the Portuguese but was not followed by many equivalent cases across sub-Saharan Africa in this period.[7] The conversion of the high chiefs of Hawaii (Chapters 7 and 8), by contrast, is representative of the wider region. One of the earliest acts in the drama of chiefly conversion spreading across the Pacific, it is particularly intriguing for the unique way that

[7] See Strathern 2017 for the success/failure of early modern Catholic missions in sub-Saharan Africa.

the abandonment of the pre-existing cultic system was disaggregated from the conversion to Christianity – allowing us to speculate on certain vulnerabilities of immanentism. The warlords of Kyushu in Japan (Chapters 3 and 4) present us with the only exceptions to the otherwise uniform intransigence of major Confucian and Buddhist rulers towards monotheism, while the subsequent repression offers clues as to how those broader regional obstacles may be conceived. Meanwhile, doomed attempts by French Catholic (and also Persian Muslim) missionaries to convert Narai of Siam (Chapters 5 and 6) represent an unusually source-rich illustration of the ways in which monotheism met a brick wall in the form of Theravada Buddhism. In this way, each case has also been selected in order to speak to larger regional patterns. Even this brief description indicates that religious systems are granted a kind of structural force in this analysis.[8] Yet this is evident only as one of many interlocking factors, without diminishing the role played by local, cosmopolitan and evanescent forms – which the specific focus of each chapter indeed affords. If, in Chapter 10, there is an attempt to explore how far transcendentalist religions were more likely to obstruct ruler conversions, the major case studies are not set up to merely confirm that hypothesis but to challenge it in various ways.[9]

The different nature of the source material for each case, and the rather specific questions they each throw up, meant that it proved more efficient to consider them one by one. But I hope readers will perceive that, while the narrative unfolds differently in each case, the discussion deploys the same conceptual framework in order to test the same set of propositions. As with any methodology, comparative analysis has its problems, but the opportunities it affords are receiving somewhat more attention of late.[10] We are, for example, pushed into a more critical deployment of our theoretical apparatus by the process of 'reciprocal comparison', according to which starting concepts are transformed as they are forced to incorporate the stubborn particularity of each case in turn.[11] It is due to this imperative to be self-reflexive and explicit about

[8] See the conclusion to Chapter 10 for the methodological anxieties around this.
[9] Note Adas 2012: 236 on the problems of case selection.
[10] Duindam 2016: 8; d'Avray 2010: 12–13; Wickham 2016: 14; Pollock 2006: 18; Pollock and Elman 2018; Robbins 2014; Freiberger 2019; Buc 2023.
[11] See Pomeranz 2000: 8, Wong 1997; and Austin 2007, 3: 'Both sides of the comparison are viewed as "deviations" when seen through the expectations of

our analytical terms – which cannot reflect the emic register of any one case – that *UP* coined some new terms and gave specific definitions to more familiar-looking ones. Chapter 1 and the Glossary summarise these conceptual interventions.

The chief advantage of the comparative method is that it also allows us to make progress in identifying the most significant lines of causation.[12] To be sure, pretensions towards scientism must be held in check; we are not, of course, in a position to test any one variable by holding the rest constant. The terminology of variables is itself somewhat artificial; in the study of history, independent variables are a chimera and we are compelled to deal with what John Llewis Gaddis referred to as *interdependent* variables.[13] It turns out, indeed, that the Buddhist theory of causation as developed by the fifth-century exegete of the Theravada tradition Buddhagosa had already articulated something like this quite exquisitely. Causation is to be understood as 'a concatenation of several potentially causative factors which are activated as causes only when they enter into a specific and opportune relationship with each other'.[14] What we may choose to refer to as 'causes' are not determinative in themselves but rather function as what Philippe Buc calls 'conditions of possibility'.[15]

From one angle, this condemns the comparative method to inevitable inexactitude, an inability to produce truly robust and parsimonious principles. From another angle, it rescues it – because we are compelled to appreciate that any one 'condition of possibility' or 'variable' may not lose analytical relevance merely because its causal outcomes diverge somewhat from case to case.[16] This sounds both abstract and messy, but the truth is that we can watch how conditions or forces interact in a more concrete way in any given case study. If we use the Great Divergence debate in economic history by way of an example, we might want to identify the fact that coal was relatively

the other, rather than leaving one as always the norm.' Pollock and Elman 2018 for concern over the use of Western conceptual categories.

[12] For a defence of causality as an objective of analysis: Van Lunteren 2019, and note (324): 'There is no specific scaling factor at which causality breaks down.'

[13] Gaddis 2002: ch. 4. See p. 63 on historians being 'prepared to acknowledge tendencies or patterns'. Of course, much scientific work also deals with interactive causation: Pinker 2021: 272–8.

[14] As B. G. Gokhale 1965: 358 explicates Buddhagosa; Harris 2014: 64; compare Sewell 1985: 58, 66–7.

[15] Buc 2023: 1.

[16] See also Adas 1979: xxii–xiii.

accessible to existing population centres in Britain as a major reason why the Industrial Revolution had its origin there.[17] But this was not an independent cause: It was rather a structure that was only 'triggered' into critical relevance once technological and capitalist development allowed this coal to be profitably exploited. The presence of carbon-rich deposits underground was of little significance until it suddenly became the axis on which the world turned.

There are, then, no laws of human history.[18] But, surprisingly often, recognising the futility of identifying *laws* seems to slide into denying the possibility of spotting *patterns* or tendencies (which is the best we can expect if we are dealing with interdependent variables). If one or two counter-examples will puncture a law, assessing the utility of a pattern requires a more holistic perspective. Still, comparative historians must always face the question of how representative a small number of cases may be taken to be. It is partly in order to ameliorate this that Chapter 10 seeks to identify patterns across much of the rest of the world. Naturally, this cannot involve the kind of primary research and close investigation devoted to the case studies, and thus the relevant mechanisms involved can only be far more generally and speculatively evoked. But scaling up to the global level allows us to see how the basic propositions might work in contending with a much broader array of instances and problems. In order to assist the global perspective, the question of how Hinduism and Confucianism relate to the construct of transcendentalism is considered in Chapter 9. The original conception of this project would have involved the spread of Islam as well as Christianity, which would have allowed for a more complete view of the victory march of the monotheisms. While I have attended to Islamisation in a few other publications, simple practicalities militated against substantial consideration in this book.[19]

The Sources

The case study chapters all concern important events in their respective national histories, and many generations of scholars have written about them.[20] I set out to use the vast majority of sources that region

[17] Pomeranz 2000: 66–8, and discussion in Adas 2012: 236–7.
[18] Steinmetz 2014: 245. [19] Strathern 2013; 2017.
[20] The Japanese case is, however, more significant in missionary historiography than in national history per se.

specialists had already identified; this is not, then, primarily an archival project. As ever, asking new questions of sources allowed them to speak new things. Still, the source basis remains starkly imbalanced, heavily dominated by European voices and largely missionary ones at that. In the case of Kongo, there are simply no relevant sources in local languages, forcing us to rely on chronicles and letters written by the Portuguese, or by later Italian Capuchins. However, we do have some long and highly significant letters written by the principal Kongolese protagonist, King Afonso, drafted in Portuguese with the help of a trusted scribe, João Teixeira, a local nobleman who had studied in Portugal and returned to the court.[21] These are vital for conveying a perspective that often differed markedly from that of the Portuguese on the ground. Indeed, John K. Thornton has remarked that this correspondence 'makes Kongo in this period one of a very few African kingdoms … whose history is documented by its own people'.[22] Hawaii was another society without a pre-existing tradition of literacy, although in this case we have vital texts containing rich ethnological material written by Hawaiians such as David Malo (1795–1853), John Papa ʻIʻī (1800–1870) and Samuel Mānaiakalani Kamakau (1815–1876).[23] These texts bring significant problems of source criticism in their train, as their authors were writing with some considerable hindsight and after they had become Christian – but they had been alive during the events in question and even involved in them.[24] The majority of sources are by American and British visitors and missionaries, although they do not, by any means, speak with one voice.

Japan and Ayutthaya represent quite a different scenario, given their long histories of literacy. But evidently missionaries were far more interested in recording the details of the daimyo conversions than were the Japanese, to judge by the preponderance of evidence: The extensive

[21] Afonso to Manuel I, 5 October 1514 *MMA* 1: 322. Afonso explicitly asserts his trustworthiness over others.

[22] Thornton 2020: 39.

[23] ʻIʻī, Malo (note Valeri 1985: xxiv). Kamakau 2022 brings together all his work for Hawaiian newspapers, 1865–1871. Malo and Kamakau formed the first Hawaiian Historical Society in 1841.

[24] Compare the issues attendant on using texts by post-conquest indigenous writers in the Americas (including the mixed-origin Florentine Codex, Sahagún 1953–1957). I am reliant on English versions/translations of sources by Hawaiians. See Silva 2004 and Chang 2017 for recent questions of source criticism.

correspondence left by the Jesuits and the particularly voluminous chronicle of Luís Fróis forms the mainstay for any work in this area.[25] Nevertheless, these may be supplemented by a number of letters and other sources written in Japanese that provide more than context; they yield independent confirmation or contestation of certain points emerging from the Jesuit evidence. They have been used here through the assistance of several translators. Turning to Thailand, the affairs of the royal court of Ayutthaya in the 1680s produced an extraordinary wealth of European letters, treatises, and travel accounts written largely in French, but the destruction of the archives of Ayutthaya after they were sacked by the Burmese in 1767 has led to a dearth of corresponding evidence in Thai. Still, some important Thai sources have remained that help us to flesh out certain aspects of Narai's court and its worldview, including some royal decrees, poetry, temple murals, and the royal chronicle of Ayutthaya (although the section dealing with Narai's reign from 1663 contains multiple recensions all deriving from the late Ayutthaya or Bangkok era and driven by the dynastic politics of that time).[26] Thus, for all the cases, it was a working method to seek out non-European sources as much as possible in order to mitigate the fundamental source imbalance; to work closely with translators and regional specialists (who also read drafts of each chapter); to use, occasionally, later ethnographic evidence where it might help (with due regard for the serious methodological problems entailed); and to cultivate an awareness of the predispositions and blinkers of the European evidence.

It should go without saying that missionary depictions of the societies they encountered and the conversion processes they (sometimes) stimulated must be approached in a highly critical spirit. Their epistles often had an exhortatory and edificatory function, with many consequences for their representation of events. Almost as a rule, wishful thinking and providential reasoning combined to overestimate how close local rulers were to making a commitment to Christianity; frequently, what was essentially the play of religious diplomacy was taken as a sign of spiritual inclination. Accounts of the role of the individual's heart and mind were liable to be so overdetermined by standard

[25] Strathern 2020a: 250–1 has some source criticism of Fróis.

[26] These were either available in translation (e.g., the Royal Chronicle, *RC*) or translations were kindly supplied by Chris Baker.

expectations of what should happen that the reader is left feeling rather unenlightened about what really did happen. On the other hand, claims about the eruptions of supernatural power into the mundane world (miracles, magic, divine interventions), which are frequently set to one side by historians, are taken seriously here as indications of a consequential logic.

Ethnologically, our sources are hobbled in many ways. Some examples would include the use of a homogenising language of kingship to describe diverse political forms; an inability to grasp hold of non-monotheistic configurations of religious identity; and a patriarchal rendering of female agency. The blanket category of paganism frequently served as a bar to more subtle appreciations of local religion – even if it is revealing as an expression of transcendentalist alienation from the sensibility of immanentism.[27] At the same time, we must take note of the whole range of cross-cutting agendas and personal proclivities that might structure missionary sources, and which ensure that light may be cast on events from various angles. Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century Pacific were entirely predictable in their antipathy to the 'savagery' of the paganisms they encountered, but their dialogic anxieties could be as much stimulated by inter-missionary debates as any desire to advertise pagan iniquity. One of our most important sources for Hawaii is the American missionary Hiram Bingham, a puritan and sombre writer if ever there was one, but whose emotions seem to be even more exercised by the spectre of atheism than by the tyrannies of the local tabu system – for which, indeed, he develops a strange sympathy. Bingham's particular concerns means that he is antagonistic towards a range of propositions concerning the conversion of the Hawaiian ruling elite – that it set off a direct process of top-down conversion, that missionaries were critical elements in political reconfiguration, that autonomous developments in Hawaiian society were ultimately responsible, and that a decisive role was played by the arrival of a group of Tahitians accompanying William Ellis – which his own evidence nevertheless provides reason enough to endorse.

[27] See *UP* 104–6.

1 *Theoretical Equipment*

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the conceptual tools that are used throughout this book, and which were fully developed in the companion volume.[1] Those familiar with the framework may skip it, although there are a few new areas of discussion.[2] New readers, on the other hand, should note how brutally condensed the discussion is here; *Unearthly Powers* will need to be referred to for a proper sense of how these concepts work and of the various theoretical and methodological questions they bring in their train.[3]

Immanentism and Transcendentalism

The most fundamental concepts used here, 'immanentism' and 'transcendentalism', refer to different kinds of religiosity. Immanentism may be defined by the following ten features:

Immanentism is the default mode of religious behaviour. Since it is found, in some form, in every society known to scholarship, it is reasonable to speculate that it has roots in evolved or at least universal elements of human cognition. Above all, this means the tremendous force of anthropomorphism – the tendency to attribute motivated agency to forces, objects, dead people, features of the landscape, abstractions and chains of cause-and-effect. In particular, whatever harms or benefits us is liable to be seen as the product of willed agentive movement. Marshall Sahlins has referred to the ancestors,

[1] And see the Glossary.

[2] The themes of cultural glamour and intellectual appeal; and a more expansive account of religious diplomacy. See the Appendix on the implications of transcendentalism for gender relations and religious violence.

[3] For example, *UP* 11–19 discusses several tendencies in scholarship that have inhibited global comparative projects by hardening into taboos: (1) an aversion to essentialism; (2) an esteem for genealogical deconstruction; (3) the prioritisation of the emic over the etic; (4) the avoidance of teleology.

Table 1.1 ***Immanentism***

(1)	Rampant generation of metapersons
(2)	Monistic cosmology
(3)	Undifferentiated afterlife
(4)	Focus on power
(5)	Unsystematised and community-focussed morality
(6)	Amoral metapersons
(7)	Empirical understanding of the function of ritual
(8)	Dynamic incorporation and flexibility
(9)	Unselfconsciousness
(10)	Translatability

spirits and gods that people our existence as 'metapersons'.[4] They circle around or tower over us to form a whole other dimension of social action, invisible and always intricately hierarchical. They may be imagined as existing in some other dimension of existence – underworlds or spirit worlds or the sky – but that realm is homologous to ours in important ways, and leaches into it routinely. Metapersons move among us, continually impinging upon our wellbeing. In this sense the cosmology is fundamentally monistic. In keeping with this monism, the afterlife is often relatively undifferentiated from this life; more consistently, it is not at all the central focus of religious activity. In Hawaii in the 1820s, for example, William Ellis reported of the afterlife that it 'could not be discovered whether they had any definite idea of the nature or even the existence, of such a state' and went on to report a range of speculations about it.[5] A range of familiar conceptual dualisms therefore finds little purchase here – including that between 'nature' and 'supernature'. (Where these terms are used here, it is therefore only in a highly etic sense.)

Instead, the main purpose of religious action is to conduct appropriate relations with metapersons in order to ensure that their powers may be harnessed for our well-being. For the success of every form of human endeavour – from waging war to growing taro – is held, at

[4] Graeber and Sahlins 2017. In his last book, Sahlins (2022) suggested that his comparative work on 'the enchanted universe' could be framed by the concept of immanentism.

[5] Ellis 368–9.

some level, to depend on it. In a more etic sense, religious activities will also, of course, serve certain Durkheimian functions of social order and cohesion. In that sense, we may refer to a certain moral or pro-social dimension to immanentism. However, this morality is essentially that of successful communal living rather than an interiorised commitment to universal principles. What the stories and symbols and rites of immanentist religion embody are the normal appetites and desiderata of this world: heroism, consumption, fertility, sexuality, honour, peace, victory. Indeed, this pertains to the nature of the gods too, who are typically no more or no less given to moral behaviour than are visible persons. Like human lords, they may be irascible and petty and vainglorious.

There is, therefore, usually a rather transactional quality to conducting relations with these beings. The quintessential means by which this is done is through rites of sacrifice, which may be understood in global terms as a form of gift-exchange – even if any particular tradition of it will be loaded with all manner of other meanings too. Thus, the mutual dependency of life and death: a logic taken to an extreme with the practice of ritual homicide. Human sacrifice is only found in some immanentist societies but in diverse and disconnected ones; it was certainly an important feature of state cult in Hawaii in the early nineteenth century. The field of the 'sacred' is not therefore to be confused with idealised images of the 'good' or the 'holy'. If the maintenance of 'purity' in the broadest sense is a defining preoccupation of immanentism, this was so only in the dimension of ritual, the physical qualities of bodily conduct and spatial arrangement, rather than as a matter of ethical or cognitive propriety. Immanentism does not demand labour in the inner life of the individual but correct observance as a social being.

Given its fundamental orientation to the business of human flourishing, immanentism could take on a deeply empirical, pragmatic and experimental quality. Relations with metapersons were expected to produce tangible results and, under certain circumstances, could be set aside if they failed to deliver. That is to say, to some extent such relations could be characterised by an 'economy of ritual efficacy'. There were several reasons why this 'economy' was usually limited in scope. The Durkheimian functions of religion, as noted above, ensured that traditional forms of ritual practice and narrative were invested with authority and hardly jeopardised by empirical setbacks as a

matter of routine. Even where ritual action was undertaken with explicit instrumentalist and perlocutionary effects in mind, there were all kinds of ways in which priests and specialists could rationalise unfavourable outcomes – a process that some cognitive scientists have referred to as 'conceptual control'. While the fundamental principles of religious life were rarely called into question, therefore, much more subject to flux was the efficacy attributed to particular instantiations of certain metapersons and their ritual interlocuters. This could endow immanentist religious systems with a distinctly dynamic and mutable disposition, especially since they were not defined and authorised by canonical texts. They did not pivot around a single decisive moment of revelation in the past; information from the sphere of the metapersons rather poured into this world unrestrained.

Indeed, exegetes of immanentist cultures frequently note that they find no emic counterparts to central concepts of the Western vernacular. The notion of 'religion' itself, as something that could be extracted from the mass of social relations and customs, is inherently alien. These are therefore the religions of no name – frequently only rendered legible through the deprecating generalisations of transcendentalisms: paganism, heathenism and so on. The field of immanentism is in an important sense borderless and elastic, such that the metapersons of foreign peoples could be equated with one's own. It was the shared, universal forms of immanentism that allowed such translatability to occur.

In what would appear to be relatively autonomous intellectual florescences animating certain parts of first-millennium-BCE Eurasia, many of the features of immanentism came under sustained assault. In this 'Axial Age' of human history, diverse thinkers and prophets established the foundations for cultural structures that persist to this day: Confucianism and Daoism in China; the origins of European Philosophy in Greece; Buddhism, Jainism and Upaniṣadic Hinduism in India; and the transformation of Judaism that laid the foundations for monotheism in West Asia.[6] Fully fledged transcendentalism emerged in the last two cases and indeed formed two quite distinct families: the Abrahamic and the Indic.

[6] *UP* 19–26 on the Axial 'age'. Important works in historical sociology include Eisenstadt, ed. 1986 and Bellah 2005; 2011.

Table 1.2 ***Transcendentalism***

(1)	Ontological division between transcendent and mundane spheres
(2)	Orientation towards the objective of salvation
(3)	Ethicisation of values and metapersons
(4)	Otherworldly values
(5)	Emphasis on individual interiority
(6)	Ideological 'offensiveness'
(7)	Attempts to canonise and textualise revelation
(8)	Intellectualisation
(9)	Self-conscious identity formation
(10)	Universalism and conversion-seeking
(11)	Assertion of superiority
(12)	Deprecation of magic
(13)	Development of autonomous clerisies
(14)	Emergence outside the state
(15)	Dynamic of reformism

Transcendentalism cuts reality into two: The mundane sphere, inherently corrupt and unsatisfactory, is set against a sacred dimension of existence that is, in one sense at least, literally ineffable, transcending any capacity of the human mind to represent it. The Buddha of the Pali canon, for example, refused to define *nibbāna* (nirvana), even as to whether it was existence, non-existence, both of these things or neither of them. But attaining this ineffable state, escaping the human condition – achieving salvation, in short – now becomes the focal point of religious activity. The new nothingness exalted by the transcendentalist traditions is made most explicit in the aniconic movements that have emerged among them from time to time: the reluctance to represent the divine that we can find at certain points in the histories of Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

The sphere of the sacred becomes characterised by absolute good, and religion becomes the search for the good – as something quite distinct from human flourishing or the wellbeing of the immediate community. It was rather founded upon a universal ethics articulating the golden rule, taking in all humanity or even all living beings, and was amenable to explicit codification such as the Ten Commandments or the Five Precepts of Buddhism. This new morality, idealised to the

point of utopianism, fought hard against human nature in certain ways. The quest for salvation can seem to flip the normal criteria of human flourishing upside down, endowing status and soteriological glamour upon suffering, celibacy, poverty, death and defeat. Asceticism arrived in the form of monastics, mendicants and hermits who attempted to live out this transcendence of human nature. Sacredness was now not achieved by amassing power, success or brilliance but by repudiating the quest for these worldly attributes. Their focus on salvation gave the transcendentalist traditions a powerful enhancement of 'conceptual control' – such that calamitous outcomes in this plane of existence did not touch upon their core purposes. Indeed, a much more holistic apprehension of evil and misfortune could now be deployed.

All this, in turn, entails an entirely new valuation of the self – as something encountered in prayer or meditation, for example. But the self is discovered only to be chastised: This shadowy interior realm of desires and thoughts is where the business of purification must now take place. As the religious life shifts from the communal to the individual-cum-universal, kinship may be cast aside or castigated. And the practice of ritual is subject to a powerful relativisation: 'If ritual is the characteristic activity of the immanentist mode (and sacrifice the most typical form), then ethics is the characteristic activity of the transcendentalist mode (and self-sacrifice the most typical form).'[7] Indeed, displays of immanent power were vulnerable to suspicion as superstition, deceit or 'mere magic'.

In keeping with their origins in the philosophical and political convulsions of the Axial Age, there is a self-consciousness to the transcendentalist traditions: They are, to use (or abuse) a term by Ernest Gellner, characterised by 'offensiveness'. That is to say, they are predicated on an assertion of the inadequacy or deceptiveness of alternative visions of reality. This new insistence on Truth rather than mere knowledge was intimately bound up with two further distinctive features that help to explain the astonishing durability of transcendentalist traditions as structures of authority: In their most definitive form they referred to a single primary point of revelation associated with a single historical figure, and those revelations were set down in textual form. This partially closed and textualised form of teachings is central

[7] *UP* 54.

to many of the fifteen features touched on here. All the transcendentalisms produced a class of literate intellectuals – a 'clerisy' – who acted as the champions and interpreters of scripture. These developed forms of learning and debate, which meant that the tradition became shaped by intense processes of 'rationalisation' and enhanced the potential for religion to reproduce itself through the 'doctrinal mode' driven by routine participation in rites of indoctrination and the extension of literacy.[8]

Indeed, most basically and tellingly of all perhaps, many transcendentalisms became religions of expansion, of conversion. They were able to move into new societies as whole systems, spreading and inculcating a relatively durable set of truths and narratives enshrined in scripture. Although it has become routine now to point out how recently certain terms and sentiments of religious identity have become normalised (that Buddhism only became an 'ism' in the nineteenth century, for example), these genealogical preoccupations have disguised the capacity of pre-modern adherents of Asian traditions to see themselves as belonging to vast moral communities and to produce discourses castigating those who disagreed with them or sought to corrupt them from within. All such traditions therefore carried within them a certain potential for identity construction, although it must be underlined that the monotheisms, structured by what Jan Assmann refers to as 'the Mosaic distinction', were far more liable to produce sharply defined and indeed exclusivist understandings of collective identity.[9] This is related to the way that the monotheisms sought to monopolise the sphere of metapersonhood, while for Buddhists the gods were inferiorised, being themselves subjected to the iron laws of soteriology.

None of the transcendentalist traditions began as ideologies of state, and they carried within them a potential rebuke of the exercise of political authority. Their clerisies developed institutions (sangha, Church), often embodying meritocratic principles, that displayed unusual organisational strengths, maintaining their integrity and coherence even while states rose and fell around them. Yet, these very same attributes made them irresistible sources of social power, which

[8] Whitehouse 2000.

[9] Assmann 2014. For Duara 2015: 6, the Indic and East Asian traditions were more capable of combining with each other in diverse ways, hence their 'dialogical transcendence'.

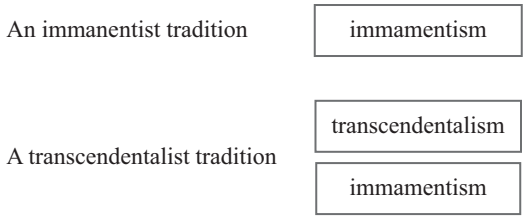
states strove to harness. But the clerisies (bhikkhus, monks, priests, jurists, scholars) could claim a moral authority that was quite distinct from that of lords and kings. Against their privileged relationship to the ultimate ends of life, the concerns of mundane politics may be deemed trivial. The social power this lent Buddhist orders will be seen to be crucial in the outcomes of the cases of Japan and Ayutthaya.

This understanding of transcendentalism was largely, if not exclusively, derived from a reading of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.[10] The much longer discussion in *Unearthly Powers* also sought to emphasise the *different* ways that the Indic and monotheistic forms embodied these features of transcendentalism. For example, from a certain angle, the Indic traditions, which conceived of soteriologies governed by impersonal cosmic laws, look more profoundly transcendentalist than the Abrahamic traditions, which tied salvation to an inflated metaperson. But the flip side of this was that the Indic traditions could leave large stretches of immanentist behaviour in place, while the Abrahamic traditions had to dominate religious life much more completely.

However, such references to 'Indic' traditions left the place of Hinduism in the paradigm ambiguous, while Confucianism was also quarantined for further analysis.[11] These are now properly integrated into the framework in Chapter 9. What we refer to as Hinduism, Judaism and Confucianism may be understood as capacious traditions that found ways of incorporating the results of Axial Age eruptions of reflexivity while maintaining a greater continuity with an ancient immanentist heritage than we find in the more radical transcendentalisms of Buddhism, Christianity and (certain forms of) Daoism. Thus, it is certainly more awkward to assimilate Hinduism, Judaism and especially Confucianism to the fifteen characteristics that were listed above.[12] Most significantly, otherworldly salvation-liberation is not a feature of Confucianism, and a far more minor element of Jewish tradition, while no principal prophet-teacher stands at the font of Hinduism. All these three traditions retained ritual practice as a foundation stone.

[10] Jainism and Sikhism would also work rather well.
[11] Although Indian and Chinese material was deployed in various places in *UP*.
[12] In terms of their core hegemonic elements rather than in any given historical instantiation.

But the truth is that all transcendentalist movements, however radical their origins, developed into traditions that came to incorporate immanentist elements.[13] Thus, any religion such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism that we may wish to refer to as 'transcendentalist' is in fact an unstable and changeable synthesis of both elements. It is extremely important to note that the reverse is not true: That is to say, immanentism has existed untroubled for most of human history.



This synthesis is apparent from the very inception of these traditions, first as a matter of their core conceptual arrangements and, second, as a matter of history, as the transcendentalist traditions were forced to gradually make peace with the structures of mundane reality in order to thrive and survive. Every single defining feature of transcendentalism was subject to reversal or erosion. All major theorists of the Axial Age, including Shmuel Eisenstadt, Eric Voegelin, Jan Assmann and Robert Bellah, have referred us to the persisting influence of what is described here as immanentism. Underlying this, surely, are the evolved structures of human cognition and need that had generated the characteristic features of immanentism in the first place. Thus the ceaseless desire to access supernatural power will turn the Koran into a magical object; the anthropomorphising tendency will ensure that icon and deity will ever be conflated; the simple fact that human beings continue to dream and enter altered states of consciousness will mean that revelation can only be reframed rather than halted, prophets and visionaries emerging willy-nilly; the instincts underpinning ritual will process the management of relations with the divine through its reassuring mechanisms; the need to represent ideas in the guise of things and images will ensure that transcendent concepts take material

[13] For clarity, the description of immanentism above is of its 'untouched' form, whereas what follows indicates how immanentist elements or tendencies work within a transcendentalist system.

form, enchanting objects and people, and forcing the ineffable to speak. All this means that immanentist elements are not best understood in terms of survival but as ongoing generation.

No less important is what happens when the movements driven by otherworldly aspirations take on institutional forms that acquire social and political functions.[14] As Christianity, for example, worked its way from the margins into the centre ground of any society, it had to take on the Durkheimian roles that religion had always fulfilled: Far from challenging the primacy of the family, the givenness of the cultural inheritance or the justice of the political status quo, it had to become the most fundamental legitimator of each.[15] Monasteries, temples, churches, lodges and shrines were pulled into local economies of material exchange, translating their soteriological capital into political and financial boons. And as the transcendentalisms expanded – both into new sectors of any one society and into new societies tout court – so they had to meet immanentism on its own terms in order to obtain victory. The development of the cult of the saints – regardless of scriptural foundations or the lack of them – in Christianity and Islam is just one of myriad means by which this happened. Christian saints even became vaguely amoral metapersons who were assumed to be actually present in their material forms and thus vulnerable to coercion. Ironies abounded of course: The Buddha of the Brahmajala Sutta may deprecate mere magic, but inevitably his own teeth and bones became the repositories of tremendous magical power after his death, while the ascetic monks who followed in his footsteps by renouncing all worldly desires were sought out by laypeople who granted them unusual capacity to bend the material world to their will. (The underlying equation here is that soteriological virtuosity equals immanentist power.)

Transcendentalism, however, fought back. Such syntheses were, over the long-term, always unstable because the immanentist elements were vulnerable to reprehension in the light of transcendentalist criteria. Perhaps broadly associated with certain socio-economic developments, at some point voices would emerge that attacked the 'paganism' lurking within the veneration of saints or idols, or lamented the way that monasteries had become sites of luxury and bodily pleasure rather

[14] Martin 2005: 12 refers to Christianity's encounter with the logic of social organisation.
[15] Loubère 418–19; Luke 9:59–60.

than ascetic self-denial, or insisted that the true meaning of the scriptures had been forgotten or that the scriptures were no longer being copied and circulated, or that true piety had been suffocated by mechanical observance, and so on. The more successful clerisies became at inducting their flocks into transcendentalist visions, the more vulnerable they became to being judged and found wanting by the same criteria. These voices are perhaps most audible in the histories of the monotheisms, most famously in their sudden fortissimo coalescence in the Reformation, but echoes may be discerned in the longue durée of Buddhism too. By contrast, nothing like this particular dynamic may be found in purely immanentist traditions.[16]

The Types of Sacred Kingship

Just as the term 'religion' has masked profound differences between immanentist and transcendentalist systems, so the term 'sacred kingship' has masked the quite different modes of sacralising the ruler these systems entailed.[17] In the immanentist mode, what results is *divinised kingship*: The ruler is treated as if they were a metaperson; they are conceived as being close to the ancestors, spirits and gods, having kinship with them or sharing in their power or incarnating them at times. This is not quite, then, to uphold the most straightforward understanding of 'divine kingship', in which the king is simply understood 'to be' a god. Rather, surveying a very broad range of cases, one finds scholars repeatedly grappling with a generic sense of ambiguity. Indeed, this is often a cultivated ambiguity, for monarchs are 'in-between' things: Already and evidently human, they are pushed part way into the sphere of the divine in order to intercede on our behalf. In this vision, the monarch may be sacralised through an appreciation of their negative powers, their capacity for arbitrary violence, and the deliberate breaking of convention. Immanentism allows for this 'non-euphemised' understanding of kingship, its unstinting gaze upon the flux of power, because the whole field of relations with metapersons is relatively non-ethicised.[18]

[16] Note, however that other forms of dualism characterise immanentism: see Gose 2022; Moin and Strathern 2022a: 324.

[17] The following section draws on *UP* ch. 3, and Moin and Strathern 2022a.

[18] 'Allows', *not* 'necessitates'. Only a subset of immanentist kingship appears strikingly non-euphemised.

It would appear, however, that there in turn are two rather different routes to the divinisation of the ruler, which means that on occasion we may need to deploy two sub-categories: the heroic and the cosmic. As is summarised in the table in the glossary, *heroic kingship* involves a claim to supernatural power and is most compelling when rulers have achieved extraordinary accomplishments, on the battlefield above all; their access to the non-human wellsprings of all good fortune is therefore advertised in an immediate and concrete manner and invites veneration. This does not preclude the king from mixing with his subjects in a relatively free and open manner. *Cosmic kingship*, on the other hand, is sustained by ritual performance rather than achieved by transgressive or godlike deeds. Given that in the immanentist worldview, the biological, social, political and cosmological realms are relatively undifferentiated, the figure of the ruler may be established as the central pivot of all of them. Thus are they fashioned into ritual objects/agents so they may become the focus of communal hopes for the coming of the rains, the banishment of disease or simply the continuing order of the universe. But this also tends to entail an effort to dehumanise the monarch, to turn them into a cult object, to constrain and stylise their movements, to obscure them from view and to isolate them from the rest of society.

These sub-types cannot be pushed too far; indeed, it must be stressed that there are times when they are distinctly unhelpful. Nevertheless, they allow us to discern what seems to be a recurring dynamic in the monarchies of immanentist societies. The heroic form is inherently unstable. As reigns wear on, as misfortunes accumulate, as less successful successors succeed to the throne, as bureaucracies develop around the court and as the ruler is withdrawn from the battlefield, the more natural it becomes to elevate their status king in the cosmic mode. This may be a strategy of the dynasty, but it may also be a strategy of lesser elites who wish to detach the ruler from the levers of power. For, as expressed in many diarchic forms of kingship worldwide, ritualisation and political efficacy are not simply mutually constitutive: The pursuit of one may damage the other. At one extreme then, rulers may fall – or be pushed – into the ritualisation trap.

The transcendentalist mode of *righteous kingship* is very different. At the centre of this vision is not the metapersonal quality of the ruler's being; it is rather their responsibility to establish the conditions within which their subjects might attain salvation, to uphold the truth and to

model a pious subordination to a higher order. The darker tones of royal sacred theatre are thereby expunged, the rites of human sacrifice anathemised. 'When kings are divinised, it is their human mortality and weakness that must somehow be obscured; when kings are made righteous, it is their human immorality and violence that must be effaced.'[19] The representation of political authority was now subject to an anxious moralising. The agency of the ruler was not tamed through ceremonial elaboration but by subjecting it to a principle of self-government lodged in their hearts and minds, reducing them to the level of all other beings concerned for their own liberation. Underlying this was a certain strand of thought by which politics may be relativised, resulting not in the secularisation of power but rather in a certain potential for its disenchantment or chastisement.[20] The clerisy were empowered to describe the ideals by which monarchs ought to live and rule. Church, sangha, ulema could be used as a vehicle of state power, to be sure; but they might also act as its counterweight, reserving the right to pass judgement on the question of legitimacy.[21]

For most of premodern history any such potential disenchantment of kingship was largely suppressed. Once again, we must recall the inevitable tendency for transcendentalist understandings and immanentist forms to combine. Thus, righteous kingship was frequently combined with and expressed through divinised forms, especially in Asia, and most spectacularly apparent in the awesome dignity of the kings of Ayutthaya.[22] Two specific forces that worked to catalyse this synthesis are important for this book. The first, illustrated in the Kongo and Hawaii cases, is the tendency for rulers converting to Christianity or Islam to stretch the immanentist elements of their adopted faiths as far as they will go in order to allow traditional forms of divinisation some sort of after-life in the new dispensation. Secondly, when rulers in any

[19] *UP* 197.

[20] Eisenstadt 1986a: 8. 'Secularisation' implies that kingship is either removed from the sphere of the religious/sacred or held there at the expense of its political and societal significance. 'Disenchantment' signals a devaluation of immanent power in describing and constituting kingship.

[21] Moin and Strathern 2022a: 18–20 then breaks down righteous kingship into 'doctrinal' and 'zealous' forms, which parallel the cosmic and heroic in certain ways.

[22] *UP* 206–13 and Strathern 2017: 38 on Christian and Muslim divinisation, generally more restrained than that allowed by Indic traditions, where the whole field of metapersons was far less problematised to begin with.

society wished to break the intolerable authority of their clerisies, they frequently turned to the register of divinisation in order to insist upon their embodiment of ultimate moral authority. Rulers who achieved unusual feats on the battlefield, creating or rapidly expanding imperial dominion, were particularly prone to turn to divinised claims – reflecting the charismatic authority, political capital and personal megalomania that their successes generated.

The Model of Ruler Conversion

Religious Diplomacy

The model of ruler conversion first draws our attention to banausic matters: the pull of diplomatic, commercial and military advantage. It comes first because such reasoning was almost a precondition of engagement with Christianity.[23] In many cases, that engagement would stay at the level of tolerating or patronising missionaries, but sometimes diplomatic considerations were strong enough to induce much more profound forms of commitment. Religions such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism created these fields of religious diplomacy as a function of some of their basic properties: the way they formed moral communities; preached a universal message; generated transnational networks exchanging higher ordination, texts and learning; and particularly insofar as they were bent on conversion of others. Naturally, these fields become particularly highly charged when these groups started expanding into new regions and did so with considerable commercial and military clout. The late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw a truly worldwide field spring up by virtue of the seafaring exploits of the Portuguese and Spanish, and the way in which Catholic imperialism was so openly and aggressively imbued with proselytising ambition. Europeans themselves tended to see temporal and spiritual dynamics as conjoined – assuming, for example, that the baptism of foreign rulers was a means of making friendly or even pliable allies.[24] Yet it is perhaps surprising how swiftly political agents

[23] Sometimes referred to as 'extrinsic factors', material and mundane benefits distinct from the inherent qualities of the religion itself. Compare Robbins 2004: 85–7 on utilitarian motives as the initial draw.

[24] Sebastião de Souto, 1561, MMA II: 477–80.

from all parts of the world and at all levels of power – from the headman of a small village on a tributary in Upper Guinea to a great shogun of Japan such as Hideyoshi – understood the logic by which showing favour to Christianity could be translated into diplomatic capital with European polities.[25] Both sides instinctively appreciated that the social power of religion could be used to organise and stabilise relations with outsiders, just as it could be used to this effect with their subjects – although these two ambitions might conflict. No doubt ruling elites came to observe a mental fallibility to which few missionaries were immune: the tendency to assume that royal shows of friendliness and tolerance towards them reflected a movement towards conversion itself.[26]

This dynamic may be inserted into a larger paradigm: the association between the expansion of trade networks, the spread of the world religions and the formation of states.[27] On a basic level, commerce typically provides the means by which inter-cultural contact occurs. Scholarship sometimes sees merchants as vectors for religious and cultural forms that are naturally inclined to spread like viruses. Hence, if we consider the historiography of maritime Southeast Asia, the expansions of Buddhism, Sanskritic culture and Islam have all been associated with shifting patterns of inter-regional trade and the political possibilities they enabled.[28] Yet, simply pointing out the mechanics of connectedness affords only a trivial explanation as to why forms of cultural influence were absorbed. The scholarship of the spread of Islam in maritime Southeast Asia has sought to identify a more specific rationale: Islamising rulers of the new city states were consciously attempting to attract Muslim merchants to their ports.[29] As Sebastian

[25] Upper Guinea: Cipriano, 10 June 1596, MMA, 2nd series, III, 390–4; Rema 1982: 76–7; Amazon: Viveiros de Castro 2011: 36; tenth-century Rus: Shepard 2014: 234–5.

[26] Knobler 1996: 191–2. Iberian missionaries at the court of the Safavid Shāh ʻAbbās (1587–1629) convinced themselves that this divinised grand Muslim ruler might convert, while he dropped tantalising hints in order to pursue an anti-Ottoman alliance with European powers and to play divide-and-rule with his own clerics and ethnic factions: Matthee 2010. Compare Jesuit excitement regarding the Sultan of Makassar in 1665: Jacobs, ed. 1988.

[27] For Southeast Asia: Reid, ed. 1993; Wheeler 2007.

[28] Neelis 2010; Andaya 2008: 27; Guy 2011: 252; Ali 2011: 285–6; Hall 2001.

[29] Strathern 2013, for Southeast Asia; also, Strathern 2017; Tymowski 2009: 67.

Prange has pointed out, the Koran 'even describes the sails of ships as portents of the faith "like banners on the sea" (42:32)'.[30]

Access to the wealth generated by luxury and long-distance commerce has often been a strong spur to the coalescence of political authority, allowing rulers to accumulate resources that set them apart from rivals.[31] It seems to have been a defining feature of kingship worldwide that office holders reserved the right to establish control over relations with foreign realms: It is their unique job to mediate the inner and outer worlds.[32] Ruling elites need prestigious luxury items in order to advertise their status, and they desired access to new military and technology capabilities and the service of mobile elites skilled in them. Some polities, however, such as commercially vigorous port cities, may be considered more 'extraverted' than others by virtue of their predisposition to suck in such outside sources of strength.[33]

The Portuguese tracking down the west coast of Africa over the fifteenth century and then up its eastern seaboard following 1498 set up an equivalent paradigm to that of Muslim merchants traversing the seas of Southeast Asia.[34] Over the next two hundred years, African rulers large and small requested missionaries or even baptism in order to gain trading privileges with Lisbon or Madrid and more informal groups of Portuguese and *lançados*.[35] The Portuguese Jesuit Baltasar Barreira (1531–1612) baptised a number of rulers in the Sierra Leone region in the first years of the seventeenth century, including the Mane-Sumba King of Tora (Dom Pedro). God then 'ordained that more Portuguese vessels than ever before should come to his kingdom'.[36] But Barreira's companion, Fr. Álvares, saw what happened when the hopes of great trade riches were not borne out. When first converted,

> various official declarations were read out, containing great promises, that ships would come, etc. When things went wrong the heathen did not remember that the advancement of the faith was the highest interest, but they did remember that no ships came. When the official declarations were not fulfilled, they said 'that's Christians for you' and they sold the Portuguese clothing which had been given them at great expense.[37]

[30] Prange 2009: 35. Christian missionaries sometimes even acted as commercial agents: Boxer 1951: 111–21; Alberts 2018.
[31] Tambiah 1976: 129–30. [32] Piggott 1997: 8. [33] Reid, ed. 1993: 252.
[34] See Strathern 2018. [35] Law 1991b: 46–7; Brooks 1996: 225, 237.
[36] Brooks 1996: 313–4; Gonçalves 1996: 185. [37] Brooks 1996: 314.

As we shall see in the case of both Kongo and Japan, firearms brought by the Portuguese played an important role. It was the prospect of obtaining firearms that seems to have enticed the ruler of Benin to send an embassy to Lisbon in 1514 requesting missionaries.[38] When Benin proved a dead-end, Portuguese merchants cultivated an alternative trading centre at Ode Itsekiri in the 1540s by exchanging firearms in return for a package of trade and Christianisation.[39] This tiny polity hosted one of the few lasting Christian dynasties in Africa during this period.

The prospect of military assistance might cast a spell on local rulers, especially where they were caught in intense rivalries. The perennial factionalism around succession meant that kingdoms were liable to crack open into forms of abnormal extraversion as reigns drew to a close. Contenders who found themselves marginalised or removed from the line of succession had obvious motives to upset the status quo by reaching for Christianity.[40] This is what led to various sidelined princes in Sri Lanka touting their baptisms in return for Portuguese assistance from the 1540s onwards.[41] Indeed, a general principle is apparent: The more a region has fragmented into competing polities or rivals facing existential threat, the stronger the incentive to reach out for foreign sources of assistance.

Where Europeans came to intervene with greater belligerence, this dynamic could take on a more coercive and desperate aspect. Queen Njinga of Ndongo and Matamaba spent all her adult life struggling against the Portuguese as a warrior leader in the region of present-day Angola and repeatedly used requests for missionaries and the promise of her conversion to open negotiations.[42] In 1656, as she sought to establish a more durable kingdom of Ndongo-Matamba, she finally agreed to baptism and the Christianisation of her people as part of a treaty that she hoped would provide a lasting guarantee of peace. Meanwhile, Spanish Capuchins labouring in the court of Allada in 1660–1661 learned that they were tolerated 'more from fear than from love of what we had proposed', for it was assumed that if they felt

[38] Ryder 1969: 46–7; compare Kabaka Mutesa, nineteenth-century Buganda: Peel 1977: 128.
[39] Ryder 1960. [40] Strathern 2007b; Webb 1965: 36.
[41] Strathern 2007a. Compare 1640s: Biedermann 2017.
[42] Heywood 2017: 74–8; 165–92. For Boris I of Bulgaria, 860s: Sullivan 1994: 69.

rejected the King of Spain would be offended and send a punitive expedition.[43]

Yet if the connection with hard power was so strong, it is not difficult to see how the whole field of religious diplomacy might easily sour as a result. Consider the fact that the Portuguese insisted on baptism on the part of chiefs in Angola as a mark of their submission to vassalage in the 1580s–1590s, for example. What did this signal to elites in the wider region? Even the Catholic kings of Kongo warned their neighbours in Ndongo that missionaries were part of a Portuguese plan to rob them of their kingdom.[44] In the Karanga state of Mutapa in South-eastern Africa (modern Mozambique), the Jesuits had come close to an extremely important conversion in 1561; indeed, they had even baptised the young king. But what should have been a glorious opening for the faith ended up with the Jesuit Gonçalo de Silveira strangled and cast into a river. It seems that he had received advice that the missionary 'had been sent by the governor of India and the captain of Sofala to spy out the land' – and that the rite of baptism was the means by which the king would be brought under their control.[45] Such intuitions were not entirely paranoid: The Portuguese went on to launch projects of territorial conquest in both Angola and Mozambique, and used the mistreatment of Jesuits as part of their rhetorical justification.[46] In Sri Lanka, where the Portuguese also introduced a clear association between vassalage and baptism, they first sought to exert influence through Christian client rulers, then, by the end of the century, launching a war of conquest.[47] No wonder rebels turned to the imagery of anti-Christianity to symbolise their resistance.

Foreign military power is of course only attractive to local rulers to the extent that it can be harnessed to their interests, turning it inwards to overawe internal rivals and subjects or outwards to defeat enemies. The ease with which that sense of opportunity may transmogrify into

[43] Relation of the Kingdom of Arda, 17 July 1662, MMA XII, 379–89.
[44] António Mendes, 9 May 1563, MMA II, 502; Jesuits in Angola, 1 May 1594, MMA IV, 555.
[45] Luís Fróis, 15 December 1561, DPMAC VIII, 56–8; António Caiado, 1561, DPMAC VIII, 5–9.
[46] Francisco de Gouveia, 1 January 1564, MMA XV, 231; Heywood and Thornton 2007: 154.
[47] Strathern 2007a.

threat helps explain the volatility of religious diplomacy. Moreover, religious diplomacy was most compelling when just one religious system was associated with the benefits brought by a single dominant foreign partner. If the Comaroffs have argued that the Protestant message in nineteenth-century Africa was of a piece with 'the global spirit of commerce' and free trade, the Iberian approach rather mirrors the logic of mercantilism: Catholicism was used to secure the kind of monopolistic relations that often slipped into clientage.[48] But in the latter half of the sixteenth and especially the seventeenth centuries, other European powers, and especially the Protestant Dutch, began to challenge the Portuguese for maritime primacy. At this point the very binding and permanent nature of allegiance associated with Catholic baptism might become a liability for trade-oriented rulers who would rather profit from maintaining a position of diplomatic flexibility. The growing pluralism of the European expansion benefitted coastal African powers who could play the diverse nations off each other and were by no means forced to consent to the terms of any one group.[49]

The underlying dynamics extended well beyond early modern or Catholic forms of seaborne expansion, however. British missionaries in the Pacific in the early nineteenth century understood that that their presence could be seen as a means of presenting a friendly face to the trading ships.[50] In 1824, James Elder wrote from Tahiti that the chiefs tolerated the missionaries because

> They considered, by the continuance of the Missionaries & Ships touching at the Island, from which they obtained firearms, & other property, they would keep down rebellion, and eventually completely humble the discontented. On the other hand, the Chiefs thought if the Missionaries went away, Ships would not visit the Island, that they would get no more firearms.[51]

Recently converted regional Christian hegemons tended to further fuel religious diplomacy by extending it to their neighbours and vassals.[52] The Fijian chiefly contender Cakobau, who had long resisted baptism, was finally compelled to call on the assistance of the Christian Tongan

[48] Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Peel 2003: 5.
[49] Ebert 2008; Kelly 2009: 151. [50] Watts et al. 2018: 560.
[51] Newbury 1980: 44; compare Thomas 2010: 115–16; Latukefu 1974: 26.
[52] Compare Higham 1997 for Anglo-Saxon kings.

king Tāufa'āhau in order to defeat his rivals in a major battle in 1855. His baptism followed.[53]

Magic and Immanent Power

Religious diplomacy was normally not enough by itself to entice rulers to take the high and narrow path from patronage of mission to baptism itself. That was rather associated with a striking display of immanent power on the part of the new cult: the second element in the model of ruler conversion. A dramatic change of fortune, a healing miracle, a great battle won after the new deity had been propitiated: These often proved decisive in tipping a ruler into accepting baptism or providing a persuasive story of superior power that could be communicated to subjects. Such accounts in our sources naturally come freighted with significant issues of source criticism.[54] But from a global perspective they reflect fundamental qualities of immanentism and the way in which it was partially subject to an economy of ritual efficacy – the possibility that the stock of ritual activities may rise or fall depending on how far the desired outcomes are achieved.[55] It was noted above that the reach of that economy tended to be limited to the more superficial elements of religious life – should one attend this shrine or that? – rather than its deeper underpinnings. Priests, shamans, monks, magicians, healers and holy men had all manner of ways they could exert 'conceptual control' over the interpretations of events following their interventions. But it would seem that there were situations in which that conceptual control could be stripped away and a more explicit atmosphere of competition between ritual systems invoked. This was particularly visible in moments of existential import (the battlefield, the sickbed) when empirical outcomes mattered above all else and an experimental attitude towards ritual solutions was most compelling.

Christian (and Muslim) missionaries often arrived with a set of attributes that would stimulate that sense of competition and allow them to gain an advantage in it. Some of these were rather contingent: Arriving as confident strangers from afar, they might benefit from a general tendency to attribute supernatural power to the alien and

[53] Derrick 1950:114–16; Routledge 1985: 86. [54] Explored in *UP* 261–4.
[55] *UP* 219–29 for theoretical debates about ritual.

exotic.[56] Moreover, where they came associated with new technologies – of iron working, firearms, medicine, literacy, for example – these displays of special attainment might be taken as evidence of the efficacy of their rituals and the metapersons with whom they claimed to communicate. Other attributes were more inherent. The supercharged offensiveness of monotheism turned proselytisers into de facto atheists: Thanks to the selective disenchantment taken by transcendentalism, they were able to step outside of the universal forms of immanentism and turn a withering scepticism upon the powers of all other metapersons. In all the cases of successful ruler conversion discussed in this book, acts of iconoclasm played a central role as deliberate provocations of rival gods and revelations of their impotence. Thus, Catholic missionaries used the techniques against 'pagan' sacred spaces and objects that Protestants used against the immanentist qualities of their own faith.[57]

There is a great irony here. For all that I have underlined the distinctiveness of transcendentalist traditions, what has emerged from the comparative investigation is how important it was for religions like Christianity and Islam to mobilise their immanentist dimensions in order to make breakthroughs. When expanding into regions untouched by the world religions, missionaries had to prove that the new religion was better at doing what the old cults had already aimed at.

To be sure, there was no guarantee that such demonstrations would be forthcoming. The play of fortune and misfortune – as seen most dramatically in the case of Japan – might well turn against them. Missionaries did not have infinite reserves of conceptual control with which to rationalise unwanted outcomes. Moreover, even where missionaries were associated with unusual supernatural powers, this might arouse suspicion as much as any admiration – given the way that the immanentist mind need not associate such powers with moral status. This is most explicit in the case of Kongo. But over the longer term, transcendentalism did indeed bring new and powerful forms of conceptual control that tamed the economy of ritual efficacy. It was, then, *what followed* the conversion process that ultimately gave transcendentalist systems a competitive edge over purely immanentist

[56] *UP* 234–6.

[57] This form of iconoclasm was unknown in immanentism. Immanentism could generate two other forms, however: 'auto-iconoclasm' and 'warrior iconoclasm' (*UP* 239–44). These played a role in the Kongo, Japan and Hawaii cases.

traditions. Eventually, as a new mentality took root, the whole question of earthly fortune was subordinated to a larger soteriological vision, in which, for example, the most profound failure of death might be reinterpreted as martyrdom. On the other hand, where rival transcendentalist systems such as Buddhism were encountered, missionaries found that their opponents had not only their own immanentist machinery to deploy but also a much more formidable weapon: a shift of the cognitive framework by which immanent power might merely be rendered trivial, superstitious or demonic rather than attractive. Such would be the case in Japan and Ayutthaya, as we shall see.

Making States

If, in stage two of the model, rulers sought access to supernatural power in order to shape the material world to their advantage, in stage three they deployed its social power in order to shape human communities and arrange them according to an hierarchical order. (In terms of the ancestral figures of scholarship, this is somewhat akin to moving from James Frazer to Émile Durkheim). At times, rulers recognised this most explicitly; certainly, if they did not corral this social power then rivals and rebels would.[58] Commanding the religious sphere was, then, an inherent dimension of state construction. Broadly speaking, immanentist religious specialists tended to be much less centralised and their moral authority much less distinctively realised. This had its benefits: It meant that rulers could aspire to create state cults and place themselves at the pinnacle, uniting temporal and spiritual authority in their own persons. But these cults only overlay a somewhat atomised and heterogeneous religious landscape, especially where expansive imperial states had developed.

One possible attraction of a top-down conversion process was, then, the opportunity to establish a more unified or 'consolidated' religious field.[59] There are some rather abstract elective affinities to consider here. It is difficult to avoid noticing a striking isomorphism between transcendentalism and the project of the state: The former effects an unusually comprehensive form of dominance on the religious plane to

[58] I do not, then, invoke a classic form of functionalism here, for the social power of religion could be used to break down larger social orders: *UP* 116.

[59] The consolidation of the religious field refers to the process of bringing religious activity under central control.

match what the ruler hopes to achieve on the political one. On a more concrete level, Christian churches brought with them various technologies of administration that were not yet in evidence in some parts of the world, including literacy, law making, and a centralised patronage system. Given the great risks that conversion often entailed, hard-headed rulers surely identified certain political advantages that would accrue in their lifetimes. An intriguing statistical analysis of the conversion among the many societies of the Pacific has shown that Christianity spread significantly more quickly among societies that had already generated political leaders than among more egalitarian ones.[60] The swift conversion of the nascent kingdom of Hawaii in the 1820s is paradigmatic.

But the chiefs of Hawaii were among some of the most divinised of human beings in the world ... Let us not overlook the paradox here. Conversion could entail a diminution of the sacrality of one's being while also introducing a new institution, the clerisy, whose independent moral authority must now be contended with. The various dimensions and nuances of this question are explored at length in *Unearthly Powers*, but, for now, we may recall that the two modes of divinised kingship both had their frustrations. In its pure form, heroic claims were inherently unstable, insofar as they were related to the active generation of charisma. Cosmic kingship, on the other hand, might evolve into the ritualisation trap by which the office holder becomes increasingly secluded and removed from the day-to-day operation of executive power. Righteous kingship, by contrast, established the ruler's sacrality on something other than the revelation of their unparalleled success or their transformation into living idols. By no means, however, were such potential problems of divinisation bound to arise, and in practice converting rulers tended to find other ways of retaining divinised qualities as they recast themselves into the mould of Christian kings.

Cultural Glamour and Intellectual Encounter

These three areas of motivation may have been the most consistently relevant, but they are not, of course, comprehensive. Two further dimensions are briefly discussed here in order to underline that they would benefit from further theorisation and because they surface

[60] Watts et al. 2018: 560–1.

intermittently in the case studies: the question of broader cultural flows and the intellectual appeal of the new faith.[61]

The first of these refers to the sense in which religion may be absorbed by royal courts as part of a more general stream of prestigious culture including clothing, tools, names, poetry, food, music, court protocol, legal systems, languages, forms of politeness, administrative offices and so on. In terms of emic conceptions, recall that immanentism does not tend to isolate 'religion' from other cultural processes. But how are we to understand such cultural flows? By what means do people lose their sense of the naturalness and superiority of their own cultural forms and aspire to those associated with others? This is particularly noticeable of elite groups, who may occupy the highest rung of an internal status system but are somehow induced to feel keenly their lower position within a much larger setting.[62] Why did elites on the political or geographic periphery of ancient Rome or China come to feel that they were also somehow culturally peripheral to the extent that they adopted Latin and Christianity, or Chinese and Confucianism – at once signalling an elevation in their standing vis-à-vis local rivals and a prior cultural inferiority vis-à-vis the 'centre'?

Thus, we are beckoned towards a large analytical vista that scholarship now rarely feels able to contemplate. Once upon a time, it would have swum into view all too readily, when societies could be imagined as occupying different positions along a single line of civilisational development from barbarity to civility.[63] In the 1950s, a work such as Robert Redfield's *The Primitive World and Its Transformations* could happily speak of more or less advanced cultures.[64] That this discourse has lost its power is of course to be applauded, but a certain explanatory vacuum has been left behind. Hence Sheldon Pollock can argue that,

> The comparative study of premodern processes of cosmopolitan transculturation – of how and why people may have been induced to adopt languages or life ways or modes of political belonging that affiliated them with

[61] These themes are less acutely and consistently germane, however, and so not included in the model.

[62] This may even amount to a sense of humiliation. Robbins 2004: 9.

[63] Voltaire 2009, III: 273, for the principle by which the more civilised society will impose itself in cultural terms on the less civilised, even if the military dynamic is the reverse.

[64] Redfield 1953.

the distant rather than the near, the unfamiliar with the customary - is very much in its infancy, even for a phenomenon as significant in the creation or construction of the West as Romanization.[65]

What is required, it would seem, is a politics of cultural glamour – and evidently modern assumptions of ethnic and national feeling are a poor guide to the dynamics involved. Mary W. Helms and Marshall Sahlins are unusual in investigating this comparatively and systematically.[66] They have drawn our attention to the tendency of ruling elites to establish means of distinguishing themselves from their subjects, asserting their unique status as opposed to their shared identity. In their struggle to distinguish themselves from the people beneath them and from upstarts lurking in the wings, rulers are given to flourishing foreign markers of status – rituals, priests, objects, titles, clothing, correspondence – that others cannot attain. As Arjun Appadurai noted, rulers were heavily invested in encouraging and controlling the flow of luxury material culture.[67] Indeed, in general terms, the traffic of high status items was an aspect of the encounter in all the case studies: the shift from red feather cloaks to British apparel in Hawaii; the incorporation of Portuguese firearms, cloaks and other items of clothing, and royal regalia, in Kongo; Chinese silk and fire-arms in Japan; and a host of French clocks, mirrors and other luxury items in Ayutthaya.[68]

Naturally, the appeal of foreign ways and things was multi-faceted, encompassing the advantages of trade discussed under religious diplomacy and even the enticements of immanent power. To pause on the latter, Sahlins has drawn our attention to the way that certain rulers or whole societies may excite the admiration and jealousy of faraway peoples who attribute them with magical power. (If Frazer and Hocart argued that there were ritual kings before political kings, Sahlins argues that there were ritual empires of soft power before there

[65] Pollock 2006: 10.

[66] Helms 1988; 1993. Sahlins's 'The cultural politics of core–periphery relations' (Graeber and Sahlins 2017: ch. 6) reminds us of an anthropological tradition of examining cultures in terms of their relations within a network, one with little in common with either old diffusionism or modern globalisation theory.

[67] Appadurai 1986: 22, 33.

[68] This is *not* to argue that such selective importations indicated a general sense of cultural inferiority: See the discussion of Japanese *nanban* style on p. 125. somewhat akin to European chinoiserie.

were political empires of hard power.)[69] But cultural glamour as an intrinsic element of broad geographies of status consciousness was no less real. In explaining the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), expresses very bluntly the primary immanentist utility of the new religion, to be sure: The dharma is like 'a wish-fulfilling gem … Every prayer is answered and not a need goes unfulfilled.' But note, too, a sense of being left out of a wider order: 'The many countries to the west all worship this Buddha. Is it only Japan (Nihon) that will reject this teaching.'[70]

In what circumstances do some societies acquire a powerful 'superordinate' quality, to use Helms' term – creating a widely compelling language and aesthetics of high status – while others tend towards the acquisitional?[71] It is not surprising that one of the few to see the problem and attempt an answer was Marshall S. Hodgson. Wanting to explain the appeal of Islamicate culture in more general terms, he posited a 'culture gradient' by which 'elements of culture tended to move from the most cosmopolitan of centres to the most isolated'. This was partly to do with the concentrations of wealth and power that accumulated at those centres, but it was also because the conditions maintained there for the generation of inherently more impressive cultural forms.[72] However, whether cosmopolitanism itself can do the analytical work previously occupied by stadial understandings of culture is unclear. Hard power is surely an important part of the picture; it was undeniably an element of the appeal of Rome, Byzantium, China. But hard power may also appear simply barbaric. The question is how some cultural traditions generate huge quantities of soft power even where no hard power has been exercised. This is the scenario that Sheldon Pollock presents for the striking importation of the Sanskrit imaginaire across South and Southeast Asia in the first millennium CE, but it also approximates to the subsequent appeal of Persian high culture across much of this region (and West Asia) as described by Richard Eaton.[73] Both Pollock and Eaton consider this appeal as something quite distinct from religion and as reflecting certain inherent features of the languages and high cultures in question:

[69] 'The cultural-cum-political authority of dominant societies in many traditional core–periphery formations … is based rather on an indigenous anthropology of the metahuman sources of human welfare.' Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 346–7.
[70] Deal and Ruppert 2015: 14. [71] Helms 1993.
[72] Hodgson 1974: 539–40; compare Cook 2014: 264. [73] Eaton 2019.

that they were unusually cosmopolitan, universalising, beautiful and endowed with communicative power, and that they were the vehicles for a range of dignifying literary traditions and cultural resources. But how might we translate this into a more generalisable principle? Such arguments raise a question that seems to have barely received theoretical attention: the extent to which modes of civility are roughly commensurable on a global scale. Are such notions of beauty and dignity somehow instinctively appreciated cross-culturally? Does something like Norbert Elias's 'civilizing process' represent in very rough and general terms a trajectory along which any society or elite group may be able to place itself – or must sensations of civility be understood in a purely relativistic manner? I do not pretend answers to these questions here. It may be that a whole set of issues to do with acculturation and mimesis may come to be understood in terms of 'evolved capacities for cultural learning' that prioritise preferential attention towards 'more successful or prestigious people'.[74] In any event, the whole field has yet to be considered with comparative rigour.

As for matters of the intellect, on some level all conversions must be processed through the individual mind and the rationalising forces of inter-personal discussion. Did transcendentalist proselytisers hold certain advantages in argument with immanentist hosts?[75] This might seem to follow from some of the central features of transcendentalism per se, in particular the profound intellectualisation to which their traditions had been subject. Founded in texts and conveyed by a literati, they produced genres of exegetical and philosophical writing and traditions of scholarship concerned with systematising, debating and justifying their core commitments. As 'offensive' traditions, they were intent on explicitly exposing the falsity of other teachings and often produced specialists who were skilled in debate. Does this mean, however, that they held any advantage in dialogue with people holding to very different religious worldviews?

It is surely a great irony that stage two of the model focuses on immanent power, when transcendentalist traditions were defined by their exaltation of a quite different objective, that of salvation – on which missionaries ceaselessly strove to focus attention.

[74] Henrich 2020: 63, 97.

[75] This could only be sustained after more serious comparative work. For problems with deploying rationalisation theory: Hefner 1993: 15–18.

In immanentist societies this amounted to stimulating anxieties over post-mortem existence in order to then triumphantly allay them. To the extent that this did in fact happen, it would mean that transcendentalism was shifting the terms in which its arrival was construed away from the immanentist logic already in existence. Once introduced to the concept of salvation for the first time, were local societies liable to come under its spell?

None of these propositions are ruled out by this book. It is simply the case that in the two principal immanentist cases explored here, Kongo and Hawaii, neither the perceived outcomes of intellectual encounters nor a transformative awakening to salvation emerged as convincingly decisive elements. To some extent, that may simply reflect the particular cases in question. It almost certainly reflects the particular nature of the evidence, insofar as it is structurally inadequate (in terms of genre and derivation) for conveying much sense of such matters, particularly in the case of Kongo. And it probably also depends on a particular interpretation of missionary reportage, which frequently seems thin, formulaic, idealised and propagandistic when it touches on matters of intellectual exchange. Yet other readings may be possible. It is very important to note that the discussion here does not imply that rulers did not cognitively and emotionally embrace their new religion. The behaviour of some rulers – one thinks particularly of Afonso of Kongo and Ōtomo Sōrin of Bungo – is consistent with a deep interiorisation of Christianity at some point in their careers. Nevertheless, it must be considered that there was no avoiding the political implications of any change in the public religious commitments of rulers, whatever the private and intellectual journeys that lay behind them. Rulers had to have at least one eye on utility in its various guises. And they had to provide a compelling argument to their subjects for whom this-worldly matters were still the vital point of consideration. This helps to explain why the factors in the tripartite model were more significant.

What happened when Christian missionaries encountered societies where a transcendentalist tradition had struck deep roots, as in the Japanese and Ayutthaya cases? 'Salvation' itself did not arrive as a novelty; argument would be drawn as to what it was and how it might be attained. Missionaries would meet their own reflections, disturbingly distorted: people ready to debate on points of epistemology, ontology, soteriology and metaphysics, and to refer to sacred texts

and exegetical traditions for authority.[76] It is likely then, quite simply, that the whole field of debate about such things mattered more. But these equivalences cut both ways. On the one hand, shared concerns with salvation or the problem of evil or the nature of virtue and shared respect for the forms of debate might provide a bridge between different transcendentalist traditions along which the open-minded could be induced to travel. In Japan, we do at least have the case of the conversion of certain high-ranking intellectuals in Kyoto, whose decisions can indeed, remarkably, be related to formal debate. But the stories of Japan and Ayutthaya also illuminate the obverse point, that monks, Brahmins and mandarins could give as good as they got, meeting missionaries on their own terms and prevailing. Christianity had its own special form of transcendentalism to purvey, strikingly different in all sorts of ways from the Asian variants and therefore potentially appealing to certain individuals in the new vistas it opened up. But it was hardly in possession of any of the putative advantages of superior rationalisation.

[76] See Brack 2021 for debates between competing transcendentalisms in Central Asia.

PART II

Cases

2 *The Miracles of Kongo, 1480–1530*

Rising from the table [the Mani Soyo said] that of the food leftover from their feast made by the Christians, none be given to any black, no matter what their status, not even his son, but only to the Portuguese and the blacks who came from Portugal already Christians. And the bones he ordered gathered together, and as holy things from being touched by the Christians, he ordered them to be cast into a river, considering that it would be an act of great disrespect if feet should trample them, for they had touched the mouths of the Christians.

Rui de Pina, on the baptismal feast of the Mani Soyo in Kongo, 1491[1]

Towards the end of the fifteenth century an extraordinary series of events unfolded in Central Africa. They seemed to indicate that the ancient achievements of missionary forefathers working among the pagan rulers of Europe might once again be replicated in the new regions of the world that Iberian mariners had started to uncover.[2] In 1482–1483, a Portuguese expedition under the explorer Diogo Cão had made landfall off the coast of the kingdom of Kongo and became the first Europeans to make contact with its people, then governed by one of the few substantial states in sub-Saharan Africa at that time.[3] Having sent a greeting party and presents to the king in the interior, Cão then did not wait long enough for their return.[4] He set sail for Lisbon with some Kongo noblemen on board, including the nobleman Kala ka Mfusu. They had been captured as hostages with the intention

[1] Pina 68. Rui de Pina's *Chronica* of 1515 is based on an account he wrote in 1492, which we only have in an Italian translation. Faria 1966 points out the most significant differences between the two texts.

[2] Loubère 61.

[3] On Cão's voyages, Disney 2009: 36–7.

[4] For the early encounters, I have used Pina 32–5, 56–68; Garcia de Resende, *Crónica de D. João II*, MMA: 69–74; and João de Barros, *Primeira Década da Ásia*, MMA: 78–85. See also Francisco de Santa Maria, *O Ceo Aberto na Terra*, 1597, MMA: 90–3; Jerónimo Osório, *De rebus Emmanuelis gestis*, trans. Gibb, 1752: 154–62; and Enciso 1519: edition unpaginated but 'manicongo' in margin.

to train them as interpreters for future communication.[5] When they reappeared, now baptised as Christians, with the return of the Portuguese to Kongo in 1485, they were greeted with wonderment. In 1487, a proper embassy was dispatched to Lisbon, led by Kala ka Mfusu, this time bearing gifts of fine textiles and carved ivory along with the king's expressed wish to be baptised.[6] These ambassadors were duly instructed in both the Christian faith and the mores of Portuguese civility, and when they returned once more in 1491 it was as part of an expedition lavishly provided with gifts and craftsmen. They were first greeted by the governor of the coastal region (see Map 2.1) and the king's uncle, the Mani Soyo, who was promptly baptised: The baptismal feast was described by the chronicler Rui de Pina (as quoted in the epigraph). The party then moved to the capital, Mbanza Kongo, and baptised the king, Nzinga a Nkuwu himself, who became known as João I.

Although Nzinga subsequently dropped his Christian commitment, his son Dom Afonso held to the new faith, and in 1506 he won a great battle that secured his succession to the throne. In the letters and reports from Kongo, Afonso appears as a King Alfred to his people, building churches, setting up schools, training his people in literacy and laying the foundations for the expansion of the faith.[7] From that point on, the kings of Kongo regarded themselves – and were regarded by Europeans – as a Christian monarchy, who corresponded with the papacy and sought to spread the faith to their neighbours. Kongo Catholicism lasted into the nineteenth century and informed the cultural lives of enslaved populations taken across the Atlantic.[8]

Before contact, Kongo religious culture was untouched by any transcendentalist tradition; indeed, material from Kongo and early modern Central Africa was drawn upon in *Unearthly Powers* in order to help illuminate certain themes of immanentism more generally. But the Kongo case does not stand as an example of the general reaction to the Portuguese as they had tracked down the western African coastline over the fifteenth century. Elsewhere, they may have been met with some surprise and curiosity at times but without triggering great projects of

[5] Apparently, a common Portuguese practice: Brinkman 2016: 259.
[6] Thornton 2020: 38 on Kala ka Mfusu.
[7] The reference is to Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, 871–99 CE.
[8] Heywood and Thornton 2007; Fromont 2014. There is much debate on how extensively and enduringly the Kongo people were Christianised. Sweet 2003.

social and cosmological transformation.[9] And afterwards, too, there were few stories of African ruler engagement with Christianity to match the swiftness and profundity of what happened in Kongo.[10] We must also look, then, to a constellation of more specific forces.

Religious Diplomacy

Among these forces was not an unusual pulsation of European missionary energy. The agency of clerics is almost insignificant in the chain of events that has come down to us, in which the real dynamic is the relationship being forged between the two crowns. Hence, it seems particularly apt to place the beginnings of Christian appeal under the heading of 'religious diplomacy' – conducted between two parties assuming a basic parity of esteem.

Undoubtedly, the decision to be baptised was informed by the identification of certain material and political advantages. The Portuguese came to trade, and the king of Kongo surely wished to present himself as a favoured partner.[11] The weaponry and firearms brought by the Portuguese had made an impression wherever they went in Africa, as their representation in the art of Benin exemplifies.[12] The Portuguese refused to trade in firearms with non-Christian rulers, an obvious advantage of conversion.[13] With Portugal secured as an ally following his conversion in 1491, King João was immediately able to call upon Portuguese troops armed with crossbows to help him crush 'rebels' (they may have been people resisting an expansionary movement along Kongo's Nsundi periphery).[14] Although there is little reason to endorse the suggestion that Afonso received Portuguese support in the battle of 1506 that settled his succession, he did consider that the Portuguese had a duty to assist him once he had converted.[15]

[9] Tymowski 2015. [10] Strathern 2018. [11] Hilton 1987: 291.
[12] Metzig 2016: 45–8. [13] Thornton 1992: 45; Tymowski 2015: 230.
[14] Pina 135; Faria 1966: 259–69; Barros, MMA: 146; and Pigafetta 1881: 74–5.
[15] Hilton 1985: 53 suggests that the origin of the 1506 miracle (see below) may have been actual Portuguese riding the horses and wielding firearms. However, the only source to mention any Portuguese presence is the 1591 account of Pigafetta (1881: 72), and the numbers present on the island were very small (Thornton p.c. 31 December 2011). Afonso did come to benefit from some Portuguese military help, though not in such numbers that they could have represented a major prop to his rule: Damião de Goís, *Chronica del Rei D. Manuel I* in MMA: 212–13; King of Kongo, 4 March 1516, MMA: 355–8.

A couple of years later, he pleaded for firearms from the governor of São Tomé, Fernão de Melo, to help him cope with anticipated backlash to his policy of destroying local shrines and ritual objects.[16] It should be noted that no assistance was forthcoming; he prevailed anyway.

More intriguingly, both Nzinga and Afonso were animated by the possibility of more substantial transformation of the basis on which their kingdom was constructed. Nzinga a Nkuwu's embassy of 1487–1488 had requested assistance in building and furnishing a church and in the provision of carpenters, masons, artisans, farmers and bread-makers. It was when these were lavishly provided in 1491, along with a rich array of religious items, sumptuous fabrics and a horse with its saddle and harness, that he received baptism.[17]

These events did not, then, take place under a cloud of coercion. Later conversions in the region – to the south, in present-day Angola – were heavily influenced by the threat of Portuguese imperialism, for conversion became the precondition and expression of vassalage. But nothing of the kind attended the conversion in Kongo. The paradigm of early colonialism is less helpful here than an appreciation of the 'extraversion' of African elites taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them by the opening up of the Atlantic as a long-distance trading zone.[18] But in what terms was this opportunity perceived? Why was Christianity seized upon after so little exposure to it? The answer involves something rather more complex and interesting than simple political calculation or religious diplomacy more generally.

Access to the Otherworld

For a significant strand of scholarship on the kingdom of Kongo, the reception of the Portuguese was shaped by the idea that they were supernatural beings of some sort, emissaries from 'the other world'.[19] This interpretation has not been taken up by all scholars, nor has it

[16] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 296.
[17] Pina 114–15; Resende, MMA: 119. Further documents on gifts for noblemen in 1493 in MMA: 154–9; and in 1512, MMA: 247–53.
[18] Lindsay 2014, drawing on Bayart 2000.
[19] Heusch 2000: 72–5; MacGaffey 1986: 199; LaGamma 2015: 35 (they came from Mpmeba, land of the dead). Bethencourt 2011: 66; Balandier 1968: 253–4 has them as 'emissaries who heralded the return of the ancestors'. Green 2019: 111.

been subject to the controversies that have surrounded the equivalent first-contact cases of Captain Cook in Hawaii or Hernán Cortés and the Spanish in Mexico.[20] According to Anne Hilton, the Portuguese were seen as territorial spirits wielding powers of fertility: 'They looked like albinos who were venerated as water spirits; they came from the sea, which, with other stretches of water, constituted the ideal barrier between this and the other world; they spoke a strange language as the *kimpasi* cult initiates did; and they brought rich gifts unknown to this world.'[21]

Weighty concerns of source criticism must attend any suggestion that early contact moments stimulated attributions of some kind of supernatural quality, especially when they are grounded in the evidence produced by outsiders. But from a comparative perspective, at least, these attributions are not at all implausible: They have been substantially documented for many diverse societies of twentieth-century Papua New Guinea, for example.[22] This evidence, irrefutable in its outlines, underscores how creative, empirical and pragmatic immanentist ontology can be in driving cosmological speculations of first encounters – frequently including the notion of returning ancestors. This sort of evidence seems to be much less common in the African encounters, although not quite absent.[23] There is, for example, a tradition of studying the bronzes of Benin as reflecting an

[20] The debate over Cook between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere is briefly referred to on p. 255. On the Aztec encounter, see, for example, Restall 2003 versus Carrasco 2008. Inca specialists exploring supernatural speculations about the arrival of the Spanish include Lamana 2005; Ramírez 2005; Gose 2008.

[21] Hilton 1985: 50.

[22] Andrew Strathern 1979: 96; Marilyn Strathern 1992; Andrew Strathern 1980: 170; Connolly and Anderson 1987: 67 (compare the role of whiteness, death and returning ancestors); Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991; Biersack 2011a; 2011b. This topic demands a global comparative analysis, which I hope to carry out, given how unaware many specialists are of comparable cases across diverse regions and times. Arguably, transcendentalist misconceptions of immanentist ontology (translating supernatural associations into 'deification' for example) shape both our sources and scholarly arguments.

[23] Northrup 2002: 18–20; in Mozambique, Gonçalo da Silveira, November 1559, DPMAC VII: 422–3 (though this may reflect a notion of whites as *nganga*). Green 2019: 107 refers to oral traditions of the western Bapende, gathered in the 1930s–1940s, which described first encounter in the Luanda region with whites, who were interpreted as 'Vumbi, returning spirits', the ancient owners of the land.

understanding of the Portuguese as messengers from the sea and the fertility god Olokun.[24] More importantly, for the Kongo region, Wyatt MacGaffey has argued that the association between whiteness, pale-skinned people (such as albinos), watery journeys and the land of the dead is clearly observable in later periods and acknowledged in twentieth-century ethnographies.[25]

At the time of the first encounters, the horizons of the Kongo elite probably extended no further than the west Central African region: There is little evidence of direct contacts with West Africa or Muslim trading networks, for example, in the late fifteenth century.[26] The arrival of Portuguese ships would indeed then have constituted a sudden interruption of normal life. Unlike many other European 'apotheosis' controversies, the contemporary evidence cannot be interpreted via a paradigm of European self-mythologising, as no sign of this emerges until it appears in a comment by Filippo Pigafetta in 1591 (see below). Instead, the case must be made largely by reading *against the grain* of the Portuguese accounts, which are rather concerned to establish the glory of the Portuguese king as a Christian monarch. Indeed, the vulnerability of the case is rather the reverse: In the absence of any direct claims as such, it must be built up through circumstantial clues and inferences. Moreover, given how restricted the evidence is, such arguments are necessarily vague as to exactly what was asserted, by which groups, in which contexts and for how long. For example, were the Portuguese then 'both priests and incarnations', as MacGaffey suggested?[27]

We cannot hope to be precise in our conjectures. But what does seem plausible is that the Portuguese initially aroused some speculations that they were associated with the abode of the dead and the realm of the higher spirits in some way. Perhaps the best interpretation is that some Kongolese saw the events of the 1480s as an exceptionally concrete materialisation of the kind of abnormal powers that initiation cults had

[24] Metzig 2016: 48. Blier 1993: 380–1 uses Kongo, Benin and Sapi art to show how the 'Portuguese were thought of as liminal beings, individuals at home in the realms of both humans and spirits'.

[25] MacGaffey 1977: 184–6; 1995: 255–7.

[26] John Thornton (p.c. 2 June 2017). Green 2019: 109 refers to circumstantial evidence of some longer-distance connections. The religious symbol of the 'diamond-shaped cross', common to the region of Benin also, is an intriguing clue of some form of shared cultural legacy.

[27] MacGaffey 1977: 186.

always promised. This may have been stimulated by the return of the hostages in 1485 after they had been abducted and long since taken for dead.[28] Cult initiates were understood as having journeyed to the otherworld and been resurrected as new beings with new powers.[29] Given the relatively monistic ontology and the flexible creativity typical of immanentism, it becomes possible to see how the bodily journey of the hostages overseas may have been interpreted in this light – particularly given their unexpected reappearance, palpably transformed by their education and acculturation in Lisbon, the new technologies and gifts that poured from the ship they sailed in and the strange insistence of the Portuguese that the people of the Kongo must try this new rite of theirs. Is it mere hyperbole, then, when Rui de Pina tells us that the 1485 returnees were welcomed with joy as if 'they had been resurrected from beneath the earth'?[30]

It is at this point that Nzinga a Nkuwu requested baptism. There is reason to be sceptical of Pigafetta's account of the reception of the 1491 party, when we hear that the visitors were reverenced by the Mani Soyo 'almost like the gods come down to live on the earth. But the Portuguese told him they were men like himself, and Christians', for this is where we may indeed want to see the influence of Renaissance 'apotheosis' tropes.[31] But the Portuguese party was certainly met with great enthusiasm; the Mani Soyo touched his fingers to the ground and then to his face as a mark of great respect; a great show, possibly a cult performance, was enacted in which his people danced, their flesh painted white and other colours, their heads adorned with parrot feathers.[32] It does seem very likely that the act of baptism was comprehended in terms of the procedures of *kimpasi* initiation cults, the initiate entering into an enclosure containing ritual

[28] MacGaffey 1994: 257.

[29] The term *nkita*, meaning 'returned from the otherworld', was used for initiates. See also Fromont 2014: 79.

[30] Pina 56; Resende, MMA: 69.

[31] Pigafetta 1881: 71. Filippo Pigafetta was an Italian humanist (Thornton 2001b:102) who drew heavily on the writings and testimony of Duarte Lopes, a Portuguese New Christian who had been in Kongo from 1579 to 1584 and served as Kongo's ambassador to Rome. By this time, apotheosis tropes had gained greater currency: Hamlin 1994; 1996.

[32] Pina 16. Some details of this narrative accord with later evidence. For example, the Mani Soyo's hat depicting a coiled snake reflects what we know of high-status caps in other periods: Fromont 2014: 128. The neighbouring Mbundu people touched the earth to greet superiors (Heywood 2017: 231).

objects (in this case a 'house of branches' cut down by the locals), listening to unintelligible words and emerging with a new identity.[33]

This is all by way of conjecture, but there is one intriguing clue that metapersonal associations continued to cluster around the Portuguese *king*, at least, in 1491. Rui de Pina (who based his account on the report of six witnesses on their return to Lisbon the following year) tells us that during the festivities commissioned by the Mani Soyo, the wives of the noblemen were singing the praises of their husbands and boasting that theirs did best 'in service of the King of Portugal, whom they call Zambemapongo, which among them is to say "Lord of the World"'.[34] Something similar happened during the celebrations at Mbnaza Kongo too, we are told, when the people of the court raised their hands towards the sea, as if indicating Portugal, crying out, 'Long live the king and Lord of the World.'[35] In the first instance, the phrase *Zambemapongo* is clearly *Nzambi a Mpungu*, which in modern Kikongo would mean something like 'greatest of spirits'.[36] And by the time it next appears in the historical record (1548), it had become the chosen term to denote the Christian God.[37]

It is possible that Rui de Pina has mangled his source in some way, misattributing the Kikongo word for the Portuguese phrase.[38] But we

[33] Pina 63 and Barros, MMA: 79–80. However, it is conceivable that the *kimpasi* form may have been influenced by the Christian ritual by the time our evidence was produced: see Fromont 2014: 78–9, and on *kimpasi* Hilton 1985: 25; Thornton 2001a: 81.

[34] Pina 1952: 61. This phrase appears in the *Chronica* of 1515 but not in the Italian translation of 1492. However, there are signs elsewhere that the Italian translator left out certain details for the sake of brevity, which the *Chronica* retains, for example, the names of the six converted Kongo nobles: Faria 1966: 255; Radulet 1992.

[35] Pina 114; Resende, MMA: 118 gives the same information.

[36] Hilton 1985: 91; MacGaffey 1995: 258.

[37] Cristovão Ribeiro, 1 August 1548, MMA XV: 162 (where the phrase is *infumeto zambicõpungo*, which Thornton p.c. 19 January 2022 indicates is probably *Nzambi kwa Mpungu*); Jacome Dias, 1 August 1548, MMA XV: 159.

[38] The Portuguese present had accomplished translators, but obviously Pina did not know Kikongo. For the Mbanza Kongo occasion, the whole phrase is 'Long live the king, and Lord of the World; and God enlarge him since he is so good and such a friend of the King our benefactor and our lord.' Thornton 2023: 38–9, fn. 34 considers that one of Pina's sources may have conveyed the whole acclaim phrase above in Kikongo, but Pina confused which part referred to 'God' and which to 'Lord of the World'; he then interpolated the wrong words in the earlier narrative of the occasion at Soyo. This is possible, but it seems more likely that the Kikongo phrase would only have been provided for the key

would then still have to explain why the people of Kongo would acclaim a faraway king as 'lord of the world' in this striking manner. In terms of the genre imperatives of the court chronicle, this behaviour is clearly congenial: The whole narrative seeks to explain the Kongolese behaviour in terms of an instant feudal love that springs up in their hearts, as if the goodness and universal sovereignty of the Lisbon potentate were somehow immediately apparent. But what might have really been driving this response remains mysterious. It is plausible then, that the translators behind the source (or Pina himself) preferred to elide the supernatural connotations of the Kikongo phrase, making it more suitable for Christian consumption and more flattering to Portuguese imperial pretensions.

If the Kongolese acclamation involved a recognition of this distant being in terms of the language of high divinity, this did not necessarily rule out an apprehension of him as a monarch with human form too.[39] Just as an 'actual' sea journey may have been identified with transition to the otherworld, so may an 'actual' king have been identified in some manner with a great metaperson by elements among the Kongo population.[40] In the neighbouring kingdom of Loango (speakers of a similar form of Kikongo), Andrew Battell noted that the king 'was honoured as though he were a god among them and called Sanibe and Pongo (*Nzambi a Mpungu)* that is God'.[41] Kingship in both Loango to the north of Kongo and Ndongo to the south was strongly associated with

phrase, that is, the title of the King of Portugal. We can rule out the hypothesis that in the 1490s the phrase only referred to human lords, which the Jesuits only later took as the word for the Christian Lord because of the actual sense of the Kikongo phrase. Thornton 2013: 58 suggests that in today's Kikongo, 'Lord of the World' would be *Mfumu a Nza*, while *nzambi* is a general term for ancestors or spirits across central Africa (Thornton p.c. 28 April 2017).

[39] By 1491, the court would have had ample testimony of the human qualities of the Portuguese, for example, from the men who had spent four years in Portugal before returning in 1485.

[40] MacGaffey 1986: 199: 'The king of Portugal was the Kongo King's otherworldly counterpart, the original force he represented, "the highest nzambi".' In modern Kongo cosmology, all spirits had once been ancestors and therefore human: see Cavazzi 1668: 3 (bk. 2, ch. 1), editor's fn. 10. Indeed, Thornton's (2013: 69) analysis of later Kikongo Christian terms shows how hard it was to remove the idea that 'the whole Heavenly hierarchy was once human'.

[41] Battell 1901: 46. Loango and Kongo may share a common origin. By the mid-seventeenth century, the people of Ndongo recognised *Nzambi a Mpungu* as a high god associated with Kongo, but this may represent the influence of

supernatural powers, including rainmaking. Most intriguingly, the correspondence of the Jesuit Francisco Gouveia in the 1570s, a hostage in Ndongo for many years, indicates that he struggled to impart to the people the difference between the kind of being that his 'Lord God' was and the kind of being that a king was:

> The noble people have much respect for our church and they show their veneration to it … they go down on their knees and do everything that we order them to do, but they do not imagine God except as a mortal man and great lord of lands, and very wise, and that by way of his knowledge he can liberate them from corporeal dangers … they pray much to me that I may pray to God for them.[42]

Their god was the king (*ngola*), and the Christian God was associated with a foreign king.[43] In the wider region, then, existing rulers were readily equated with metapersons.[44] Of course, as with the notorious case of Hawaii, this immanentist blurring of the human/divine boundary is a point that cuts both ways.[45] Was the Portuguese king being recognised as anything different to other divinised rulers? Perhaps speculations were aroused about a new type of manifestation, stimulated by the fact that the Portuguese ruler was located across a vast watery space; perhaps a hitherto rather otiose deity was now revealed in a more tangible form.[46]

There is a further element to the receptiveness of the Kongo elite to consider. Kongo shared with a wider field of Bantu mythology the notion of kingship as something imposed from without as a form of civilising mission.[47] The origin myths of the kingdom spoke of a foreign man (Lukeni) who came from the north to conquer the region,

Christian terminology: Cavazzi 1668: 3 (bk. 2, ch. 1). The founding blacksmith came from Kongo.

[42] Francisco de Gouveia, 1 January 1564, MMA XV: 231; compare 230, which suggests that the King of Angola and the Christian God were equated.

[43] Francisco de Gouveia, 1 January 1564, MMA XV: 230.

[44] Note Cuvelier 1946: 31–2, citing modern ethnography such as the Bakuba term for their king 'Dieu sur Terre'.

[45] Sahlins 1995.

[46] See Thornton 2018a. Comparatively, in the highlands of Papua New Guinea in the 1960s, the British queen could be imagined as a 'real' person who dispatched her people to the region and also one who might answer prayers in her own right because of her closeness to God. Field-notes of Marilyn Strathern, 9 July 1965.

[47] Heusch 2000; Fromont 2014: 34–7. MacGaffey 2018: 49 explicitly refers to the stranger-king model.

blessed with the skills of a blacksmith and ready to impose a new order. The association between kingship and the necessarily supernatural skills of iron working was indeed widespread in this region. There already existed a cognitive structure by which new technology, supernatural authority and lordship were associated and given a foreign origin.

Immanent Power: Harnessed and Suspected

Nor would the Portuguese themselves have been averse to crediting their successes to their special connection with immanent power (aka the grace of God). Hence the chroniclers are happy to report the Mani Soyo's motivation in undergoing the rite of baptism: It was in order to access the new material goods brought by the Portuguese at the point of their supernatural origin; it was because the whites 'believe in the true God, so he gives them all these perfect and true things'.[48]

He alone entered the hurriedly constructed wooden house serving as a church, his noblemen waiting outside in a state of fearful agitated suspense. When he emerged, his people began to peer in at the altars and ornaments of the church, and he chastised them: Being non-Christian, they did 'not deserve to see such holy things'.[49] At this point a theme begins to emerge in the narrative that the chroniclers have faithfully preserved while struggling to rationalise it: the link between secrecy and power. For the Mani Soyo insists that only he and his young son shall be baptised – quite at variance with the cultural script of a model neophyte.[50] The chroniclers appeal to the values of vassalage by having him argue that it would not do for anyone else to take this honour before the king himself had a chance to undergo the rite. But they also record that this aroused immediate opposition: The Mani Soyo's eldest son objected, and then the other leading men, until he was forced to give in. Evidently the rite was already associated with political prominence.[51]

The theme of secrecy emerges again when the Mani Soyo is interrupted by some of his noblemen knocking rashly on the church door while he is inside in discussion with the friars. The Mani Soyo orders

[48] Pina 63. [49] Pina 65.
[50] See also Pereira and Tinley Kimble 1937: 144 and compare Ellis and ter Harr 2004: 84.
[51] Barros, MMA: 80.

them to be killed, and they are only saved at the intervention of the friars.[52] After the baptisms, there is a feast conducted and provisioned in the Iberian style, and what happens afterwards is described in the epigraph above: No-one is allowed to touch the leftovers of the food made by the Christians – except both the Portuguese themselves and the returning baptised Kongolese – and the bones are cast into the river.[53] These remains are now sacred in some way: It is as if the powers associated with the new arrivals will be dispersed too promiscuously otherwise and that the proper place to which they should be returned is the watery liminal zone that yielded them in the first place. All of this indicates very clearly that baptism – like cult initiation – was essentially seen as a device for conferring immanent power through transforming being, and it made little sense to grant this to subordinates and rivals.[54]

The king heard about these events and signalled his pleasure by rewarding the Mani Soyo – now Dom Manuel – with land. The Portuguese expedition was encouraged to travel inland to Mbanza Kongo where they were met by large crowds and then conducted to the king, accompanied by many soldiers and musicians. The king showed great pleasure at the cult objects they brought, which were first of all displayed to the people outside his wooden palace and then contemplated in private with his leading men.[55] The Portuguese began to build a church out of stone in early May, but the king had been mustering troops to go to war to put down a contestation of his authority, and, impatient for baptism, he asked for the ceremony to be conducted before it was completed.[56] As solemnly as possible in the circumstances, the king was baptised (to become Dom João) along with six of his noblemen. Once again, this attempt to limit access to the powers of the new cult was opposed by the loud clamour of other nobles. The king ordered 'idols' burned, and festivities began.

Two noblemen baptised with the king arose to declare that they had had experiences in the night, which confirmed the supernatural potency of the new faith. The first (Jorge) claimed to have been visited

[52] Barros, MMA: 81. Pina 64 has a slightly different narrative.
[53] Ellis and ter Harr 2004: 52 on continuing associations between water and the underworld.
[54] In the immanentist imagination the secrecy/exclusivity of a ritual act may be taken as an index of its immanent power.
[55] Barros MMA: 80–1; Pina 114. [56] Pina 130–1.

by a most handsome woman who spoke to him and 'gave me in this way such spirit, that I will now only be killed by one hundred [men] and will have no fear of them. For this, Lord, make your nobles and vassals Christians, and be sure that with them you will double your great power in everything.'[57] Then another (Diogo) arose who said that he too had been visited in this way, and he added that when he left the house in the morning, he had found a strange black stone shaped like a cross with very well-shaped arms, which he then produced.

The Christian clergy were asked to provide explanations for these visions, and they confidently referred to the intervention of the Virgin Mary. John Thornton has aptly described these moments as 'co-revelations'. Treated as authoritative by both Catholic and local elites, their terms of interpretation fused together in a manner that both sides found compelling.[58] In this way, the immanence of other members of the Christian pantheon was demonstrated by empirical evidence: Jesus (through the cross) and Mary (the dream).[59] The continual and democratic nature of revelation typical of immanentism was therefore vital: Anyone could have these visions or dreams, and they could readily be used to establish instant legitimacy for a new cult. The cross was a serendipitous symbol here because across this region a diamond-shaped cross appears to have already acted as a means of representing communication between the living and the dead.[60]

But evidently the legitimacy of the cult was also established by what it claimed to *do*. Jorge's revelation had left him with the strength of one hundred men … The narratives contain further details indicating that the primary attraction of this new cult for King João I had been access to an immanent power that would give him a decisive advantage in war.[61] There is his haste for baptism before setting off for battle and his conviction that if his queen were not baptised before he left then 'he would never be victorious'.[62] There is the Banner of Christ he received from Fr. António, a gift from the Portuguese king, sent with the message that if used with faith then 'not only will you thereby deserve the glory of heaven, which after your death none can deny you, but even in your life, you can have it for certain that by it your vassals will

[57] Pina 124. [58] Thornton 1992: 257. [59] Thornton 2013: 59.
[60] See especially Fromont 2014: 65–198. Green 2019: 109–11 emphasises this coincidence. Compare the discovery of a cross legitimating conversion in Ndongo: Heywood 2017: 186.
[61] MacGaffey 1995: 258. [62] Pina 130–1, 133–4.

always love and serve you, and with it you will always be victorious over your enemies and never beaten by them'.[63] It had been given to the Portuguese king by Pope Innocent VIII (1484–1492) and derived from the time of the Holy Crusades.[64] For the Portuguese, the standard fused a transcendentalist emblem with a most immanent power, one that would aid the ruler in his violent and political objectives (in an emic view, it directly produced rather than merely legitimised political objectives). King João took it to war, and it helped him to victory over the rebels. Also prominent in these campaigns was the king's son, baptised as Dom Afonso, who was given the rule of this border province.

Christianity in the Kongo had therefore arrived in a manner that displayed its immanentist credentials – as war magic rather than the fertility cult emphasised by Hilton – for all to see and had passed its first empirical test in style. What happened next, however, did indeed touch upon the matter of the control of water and fecundity and reveals how provisional empirical victories could be in the initial phase of conversion.[65] It also relates to a much more general obstacle to the advance of Christianity in Africa: the political function of polygamy.[66]

João de Barros tells us that when the clergy tried to make King João restrict himself to one wife only, the remaining spouses were aghast at their impending loss of status and fomented resistance in league with the other wives of leading men who would have been affected.[67] The distinct regions of Kongo had only been woven together by the fibres of matrimony, which Christian monogamy threatened to tear apart.[68] Barros goes on:

> Like all the people of this Ethiopia [Africa], he is much given to sorceries [*fetiços*], in which they place all their faith and belief. The ministers of the devil who weave these works told the King that they knew for certain that his son Dom Afonso, by arts that the Christians had taught him, would fly every night from where he resided at the far end of the Kingdom, which was eighty leagues away, and arrive at his wives, those very wives that he (the king) was

[63] Pina 134, and also see 136, and Barros MMA: 85; Osório 1752: 148. One version tells us that the king said a prayer to the cross before he left: Faria 1966: 259.

[64] Barros, MMA: 84.

[65] See *UP* 288–91. These events presumably happened after João's reception of a Christian mission in 1504, Damião de Goís, *Chronica*, I, MMA: 194–5, citing a letter of D. Manuel, 1504.

[66] See Strathern 2018. [67] Barros, MMA: 141. [68] Hilton 1985: 36, 52.

disallowed, and have union with them, returning that same night. Apart from this offence that he did him, they told the King that he knew how to dry up the rivers, and damage the crops, all towards the end of the King getting less tribute from the Realm than he should, so that those loyal to him could not be paid, and he [Afonso] could rise up to take the Kingdom.[69]

In this vision, Christian monogamy is presented as a hypocritical ruse to access the king's wives. The perennial internal politics aroused by succession were probably the underlying cause. João was old now. One of his sons, Mpanzu a Kitimu ('the furious'; 'Panso Aquitimo' in Barros) refused baptism and gathered around him opposition drawing on a repudiation of the new cult. At the same time his rival to the succession, Afonso, was turning Nsundi into a haven for the few remaining Christian friars, Portuguese and local converts.[70] Already then, political factionalism was organising itself through religious difference.[71] Afonso was staking his succession on the new sources of power. In order to discredit him and them, his opponents did not question the supernatural potency of Christianity but rather the uses to which it was put: not to strengthen the kingdom but to sap its life-blood.[72] In this short passage, matters of natural fecundity, political unity, ritual propriety and individual exceptionality are all fused. As MacGaffey has pointed out, in the Kongo region, prophets, magicians, chiefs and witches all wielded the same sort of power; what distinguished them was whether such power was mainly used for healing or killing, and whether in the public or personal interest.[73]

If João's 'apostasy' in the face of this opposition represents the typical pushback against Christianity after an initial breakthrough, the evidence is unusually clear as to how this related to fears of a loss of beneficial relations with supernatural power. That the king was genuinely concerned about such powers is indicated by his next move.

[69] Barros, MMA: 142. The powers of night-flight granted to Afonso may still be attributed to witches or powerful politicians in parts of Africa today. Ellis and ter Haar 2004: 84.

[70] Barros, MMA:142–3; Pina 136.

[71] Afonso sought to emphasise this interpretation in his account of these events (e.g., King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 294–323), but it is comparatively compelling.

[72] *UP* 235–6 for a comparable event in 1560s Mutapa.

[73] MacGaffey 1977: 179.

He ordered a ritual object [*fetiço*] to be sent to one of his wives with the message that it had come from Afonso to protect her against the death sentence issued by the king. On receiving the charm, she immediately reported it to the king, and thus he concluded that she had not been engaged in nightly liaisons with his far-off son. He re-instated his son and had his accusers executed.

It was his pursuit of a severe form of Christian exclusivism that subsequently alienated Afonso again from the court at Mbanza Kongo, through an edict 'that any person found with idols in his house would die for it'. His opponents claimed that the people were ready to revolt over this, and Afonso was ordered to desist and summoned to court.[74] Afonso's account in a letter he wrote some years later suggests, however, that his father was still curious about the immanent powers of Christianity. He reports that his cousin Pedro was summoned to Mbanza Kongo so that he could be killed 'to see if God would deliver him' and that the king intended to strip him of his lands and revenues to see if the God would step in to provision them.[75] This is exquisitely empiricist, and suggests that evaluations of Christianity might shift rather swiftly.

The Miracle of the Battle of 1506

The anti-Christian and anti-Afonso party had thus seized the upper hand in the impending succession struggle. However, while Afonso was en route to the capital, the king died.[76] According to Barros, Afonso received a warning from his mother, Queen Leonor (a powerful political agent in her own right), that he and his retinue should enter the city of Mbanza Kongo in secret by night, carrying their weapons in baskets on top of their heads as if they were full of food. The next day Afonso revealed himself in the great square and summoned the leading men of the land and persuaded them to declare him king. The noise of his acclamation alerted his brother and rival Mpanzu a Kitimu, who

[74] Barros, MMA: 144.

[75] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA, 294–5. Alternatively, this could be sarcasm.

[76] I had dated this as 1509 in *UP* and Strathern 2018, following Bontinck 1979: 154–6 and Thornton 2001a: 84. However, Thornton 2020 has revised this date to 1506, reflecting on the implications of Antonio Carneiro to Antam Soarez, 10 November 1508, *PMA* 5: 334–5, for the movements of Gonçalo Rodrigues.

rushed towards the city with his troops.[77] Afonso waited to receive him in the square and defeated him there, routing and then pursuing him until he fell into a trap and died. Afonso's band of followers had invoked Santiago (St. James) in their war cries, and reports began to emerge that they had received a holy answer in the form of a gleaming cross in the sky and an apparition of mounted warriors who came to their assistance – this is what had led to the sudden rout.[78] Thus was born the founding myth of Afonso's reign (1506–1542) and the Kongo monarchy thereafter.

Afonso had taken a risk in attempting to move from the adoption of Christianity as one of many ritual resources to a more radical form of conversion involving the negotiation of monogamy and iconoclasm. This no doubt placed a strain on his claims to legitimacy, although contenders for the throne nearly always had to face serious opposition from rival factions, even long after accession. In his letters of 1512 and 1514, Afonso is inclined to dramatise that crisis, presenting a narrative in which 'all the people were against us' and exaggerating the extent to which he was vastly outnumbered – with only thirty-seven men on his side.[79] His general rhetorical strategy in writing to Europe was to invoke an image of a beleaguered Christian king waging a lonely fight with only providence to assist him.[80] Details in João de Barros's account complicate that picture: for example, that he had been acclaimed with great hullabaloo by the leading nobles when he had revealed himself in the main square of the city.[81]

Nevertheless, Afonso evidently quickly realised that managing the representations of this battle would be the making of him. He sent a letter to Lisbon with his ambassadors shortly after his victory, which described the accession and the miracle in some detail, and this was

[77] This battle is now reconstructed in detail for the first time in Thornton 2023: 27–33.

[78] Accounts of the 'miracle' vary in their details: Barros in MMA: 144–5; King of Kongo, 1512, MMA: 268; King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 301; Pigafetta 1881: 85; Osório, 1752: 161; Enciso 1519; Maffei 1589: 12–13.

[79] This number probably does not include the *followers* of the thirty-seven principal men, for example.

[80] This also shapes Afonso's account of his idol destruction in the same letter (see below).

[81] Barros, MMA: 144. This sits oddly with the argument that he lacked legitimacy/popularity. Hilton 1985: 53 argues that his succession was illegitimate but with little evidence. It seems kingship was elective in Kongo (Fromont 2014: 2), and contenders could appeal to a range of criteria.

probably the basis for the surviving chronicle accounts.[82] He was also intent on characterising the struggle for succession as a matter of competing religious forces, with piety facing down paganism. But was the 1506 miracle therefore only a myth in a European idiom for European consumption? It bears some resemblance to the story of Portugal's foundation in the victory of Afonso Henriques over the Almoravids at Ourique in 1139, which was popularised in the fifteenth century and also involved Saint James, and to crusading narratives more generally.[83] If that was indeed a mental template, however, there is no reason why it would not have been introduced well before the battle and have inspired an actual vision experienced by participants at the time. In Europe too in this period, there were reports of visions of phantom armies clashing in the skies, granted significance even by the most 'hard-headed of observers'.[84] Christianity had been presented to the Kongo elite specifically as a battle-winning force: Afonso had adopted for himself the metaperson who had already borne his Portuguese counterparts to power. This may even have played on the mind of his opponents, for the chronicles suggest that it was a captain on the losing side who first reported the miracle.[85]

It is true that Afonso adopted aspects of both European mythology and monarchical style in order to express the new kind of authority that he wanted to establish. He requested a coat of arms to be composed in Portugal that would immortalise 'so clear and evident a miracle and such a victory … that the kings who will come after us in this Kingdom and Lordship of Manicongo may not at any time forget it'.[86] A representation of it may be seen in Figure 2.1, in which Constantine is invoked by his white cross at the top, either side of

[82] He refers to this letter, now lost, in 1514: MMA, 294–5. It was written with the aid of Francisco Fernandes, who may have added a Christianising sheen. As Heywood and Thornton 2007: 59 (footnote 30) point out, it is probably the basis for the Portuguese narratives such as Barros (whose first 'decade' emerged in 1552) and Enciso (1519), and also the various letters of 1512 addressed to his people, lords and the pope, probably drafted on his behalf in Portugal (MMA: 266–71).

[83] Thornton 2015; Simmons 2022. Balandier 1968: 49 emphasises the foreignness of the imagery to Kongo.

[84] Finlay 1998: 20.

[85] Barros, MMA, 145. Compare the attribution of defeat to a celestial vision (possibly stimulated by 'Our Lady of Victory') by a Ndongo noble in 1586, in Heywood 2017: 33.

[86] King of Kongo, 1512, MMA: 268.

which are the scallop shells of St. James; the arms of the heavenly knights who had appeared in the sky dominate the middle, while at the bottom stand two idols broken in half.[87] Thus condensed into heraldic form was both the great empirical vindication of his new cult and the manner in which the old cult was swept way.

Yet the crucial point here is how meaningful the 1506 miracle became in local terms. Indeed, it was embedded into Kongo cultural life as a second foundation story: commemorated in stone, expressed in ritual and acted out in dance. The church that Afonso built upon the site of the sacred grove of royal graves was *Nossa Senhora da Vitória* (Our Lady of Victory), which was dedicated to the miracle of 1506 and may also have referenced the vision of Dom Jorge in 1491.[88] In the sixteenth century, this was normally the location in which kings were invested.[89] The most spectacular celebrations in the ritual calendar were held on St. James's Day, which also gave thanks for this victory, and it is no coincidence that this was the occasion when the sinews of the realm were re-tightened as provincial governors made their triennial submissions of tribute.[90] The monumental cross Afonso had erected was replicated by these governors at the centre of their towns, evoking the appearance of the celestial cross.[91]

Cécile Fromont has recently shown how successful the miracle story was in helping to 'naturalize Christianity into a Central African phenomenon' by focussing on artistic evidence and later reports of *sangamentos* or ceremonial martial dances, which formed a central part of the celebrations on St. James's day.[92] According to a description by a capuchin from the 1690s, there were two parts: In the first act the dancers appeared with feathered headdresses and bows and arrows, while in the second they wore European hats, golden crosses and strings of coral, and sported firearms. Fromont argues that the first scene dramatises the original story of the foundation of Kongo by the stranger-hero Lukeni, while in the second act we are presented with the second foundation myth, a reiteration of the theme of a higher wisdom arriving from elsewhere in Afonso's triumphant introduction of Christianity. This expresses a vivid and embodied consciousness of

[87] King of Kongo to the Lords of the Kingdom, 1512, MMA: 258; Barros, MMA: 146; Fromont 2011: 56.
[88] King of Kongo, 25 August 1526, MMA: 479–80. [89] Hilton 1985: 99.
[90] Hilton 1985: 97; Thornton 2001a: 85. [91] Fromont 2014: 71–6.
[92] Fromont 2014: 27.

conversion as rupture and of the way in which Afonso's miraculous accession had become a powerful source of legitimacy for the new ritual, social and political dispensation. By such means the charismatic energy generated on that day was preserved so that their successors might take advantage of it.[93] Thus, as in so many cases, the transgressive act of conversion always risked stimulating opposition, but the pay-off was to place oneself in the exalted position of the society-founder and culture hero.[94] This is exactly what Afonso achieved.[95]

The Implications for Sacred Kingship

One of the suggestions made in *Unearthly Powers* was that relatively under-sacralised rulers, and those who had not yet managed to consolidate the religious field, may be particularly likely to convert in order to remedy such defects in their authority. Anne Hilton and Luc de Heusch have argued, in somewhat different terms, that both of these were features in the case of Kongo. In doing so they make use of a strand in the historiography going back to the work of Jean Cuvelier in the 1930s and 1940s, which identified the figure of the Mani Vunda as representative of a religious structure over which the kings of Kongo had no control. The latter were warrior newcomers, in an uneasy relationship with the territorial spirits associated with the autochthonous people who held the power of rainmaking and fertility.[96] The detail of Hilton and de Heusch's arguments is difficult to sustain.[97] However, the general point underlying their work, and that of Marshall Sahlins more recently, calls our attention to the way that ruler conversion may relate to the logic of state construction.[98]

[93] The Constantine–Afonso myth resonated regionally: Heywood 2017: 31; MMA III: 258–9.
[94] *UP* 313 and Dumézil 2005: 179.
[95] Note also a potential association between Christianity and healing. After the Jesuits arrived at the court of King Diogo I (1545–1561), Cristovão Ribeiro (25 January 1549, MMA II: 220) wrote to denounce the secular priest who worked as the royal confessor for ambiguous and unlicensed acts of ritualism carried on into the small hours of the night. The phrasing is unclear, but it seems as if the confessor was touching the king on his wounds and sores, providing special access to Christian powers of healing and martial aid.
[96] Hilton 1985: 29–31, 46–9; Heusch 2000: 77.
[97] Thornton 2001b.
[98] Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 139–221.

In Central Africa, political authority had to be assembled in a landscape in which affairs of governance and ritual, of mastery and autochthony, of kinship and kingship, were all wound about each other.

In the wider region, as has already been noted, political authority was routinely divinised; even in the most rudimentary stages of state construction, chiefs or warlords were granted powers over the elements.[99] Afonso's acts of iconoclasm against a 'great house of idols' and a sacred grove containing the graves of his ancestors suggest that Kongo had developed a cult of royal ancestor spirits, just as, for example, Dahomey would do.[100] Moreover, it is striking that later Kongo kings were considered to possess certain kinds of immanent power that had nothing to do with Christianity but which spoke clearly of the wider regional themes of non-euphemised kingship.[101] These emerge in the reign of King Diogo I (1545–1561), who was eventually subjected to some bitter critique on the part of Jesuits. In 1551, the bilingual Cornélio Gomes complained that the king

> should eject from his kingdom all the heathen ceremonies that directly go against God and detract from the honour that is owed to him [God], giving to some creature such as is given to him the thanks for those that die and similar things. Because even though he knows that it is God who kills and gives life, he does not want to consent to this on account of his subjects, expecting all the honour and glory of God; and that he should stop all the other ceremonies that are used in this city.[102]

Thus, the king seems to be credited with godlike powers over life and death. A document a few years earlier confirms the belief that people did not die 'naturally' but only when the king wished it.[103] (In this, the king was akin to a witch.)[104] It is very unlikely that Diogo introduced

[99] MacGaffey 2005: 5. Compare Ndongo: Thornton 2001a: 82; Heywood 2017: 22–4.

[100] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 296, and 15 August 1526, MMA: 479; Heywood and Thornton 2007: 59. *UP* 128–9 for Dahomey.

[101] On non-euphemised kingship: *UP* 189–92.

[102] Cornélio Gomes, 1551, MMA XV: 166. Cornélio Gomes (Diogo Gomes before he joined the Jesuits) is a valuable informant here because he spoke both Kikongo and Portuguese (probably as a *mestiço*) and because he was Diogo's chaplain in 1546 before being sent as ambassador to Lisbon; see Thornton 2013: 67.

[103] Jacome Dias, 1548, MMA XV: 155.

[104] MacGaffey 1986: 171.

such ideas; they represent the same conflation of lordly and metapersonal power that had structured the reception of Christianity.[105]

This accords with another hypothesis from *Unearthly Powers*, that neophyte kings tend to leverage their power over monotheism at the point of conversion in order to retain or even enhance existing aspects of divinised kingship. Pre-existing practices could be translated into a somewhat Christianised register – particularly using the immanentist aspects of Christian tradition. This is surely what happened with the church to Our Lady of Victory, which was in fact built on the site of the old 'sacred grove' mentioned above. By at least 1548, the church was referred to as 'ambiro' (*mbila*), meaning 'grave'. Indeed, this was the site at which Afonso himself was now buried, with a daily Mass said in his name, and which Diogo used as a gathering ground.[106] Seventeenth-century evidence suggests that the kings themselves became important officiants at Christian rites to do with honouring their ancestors.[107] There is little doubt that a version of the royal ancestor cult was thus preserved, which Afonso at the very least facilitated through his use of sacred geography. Indeed, if gravesites across the kingdom were used as the sites of churches, then a more general notion of accessing the realm of the dead was sustained.[108] If this speaks to recurrent local themes, there are more general echoes here of Europe's early medieval Christianisation, in which churches were built atop pagan sites and where convert kings, such as Oswald of Northumbria, could become venerated after death.[109] The Mass, meanwhile, already spoke to the need for a sense of contact with the living dead, of serving the welfare of a community that stretched deep into the past and future.

Lastly, the particular freedom and control that Afonso exerted over Christianity during his reign allowed him to present himself as specially connected with God. It would seem to be a matter of absurd hyperbole when the Vicar Rui de Aguiar writes in 1516 that Afonso was

[105] Possibly, Afonso tried to expunge this sort of belief, but Diogo allowed it to flourish. See Fromont 2014, 39–44 for later associations between kingship and the supernatural powers of the blacksmith.

[106] Cristovão Ribeiro, 1 August 1548, MMA XV, 161–2 (the Italian version of this letter, Ribeiro 1548, MMA II, 186–7, indicates an attempt to play down the pagan association); Jorge Vaz, 11 February 1549, MMA II, 228. Thornton 1984: 155.

[107] Hilton 1985: 95–7.

[108] Fromont 2014; Thornton 2015.

[109] On Oswald: Higham 1997: 206–32, and also Fuglestad 2006: 185.

not a man but an Angel that the lord sent here to the Kingdom, in order to convert it, according to things that he says, because I certify to your highness that he teaches us and knows the Prophets and Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and all the lives of the saints and all the things of the Holy Mother Church better than we ourselves do. … it seems as if the Holy Spirit ever speaks through him, because my Lord, he does no other thing than study, and many times he falls asleep over his books, and many times he forgets to eat and drink, for speaking of the things of our Lord, and he is so rapt in the things of scripture that he forgets even himself.[110]

Yet this is echoed in Afonso's claim in 1512 that he had been 'illuminated by the grace of the holy Spirit, by a singular and special favour'.[111] There is little doubt that Afonso saw himself as an apostle to his people.[112] His own mediatory power with the new god was thereby underlined, almost as if he were the source of revelation. Thus, he could claim a unique form of religious status and power to which other office-holders and pretenders could not aspire.[113]

The logic of this move was reinforced by the sense in which this *Nzambi a Mpungu* was associated with ultimate high kings, such as himself and the king of Portugal overseas, rather than with the more domestically oriented lords of the region. Christianity presumably derived particular credence from its association with the wealth and status accruing from the Atlantic trade – a trade which the kings also sought to monopolise.[114] It arrived, one might say, as the ritual corollary to the forms of political and economic mastery that Afonso in particular sought to establish. Control over both these sources of 'power from beyond' would remain the aim and function of his sovereignty.

Consolidating the Religious Field: Idol Destruction and Church Creation

All this is consistent with Afonso's attempts to maintain control over the clergy and the dynamic of Christianisation more generally,

[110] Rui de Aguiar, 25 May 1516, MMA: 361; Barros, MMA: 146 on his preaching and learning.
[111] King of Kongo to the Lords of the Kingdom, 1512, MMA: 261.
[112] Preaching to his people: King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 298–99.
[113] Anne Hilton (1985: 31; cf. Iliffe 1995: 153) argued that kings of Kongo lacked a unique source of ritual authority hitherto, though her reconstruction of religion in pre-contact Kongo is somewhat speculative.
[114] Hilton 1985: 62.

'consolidating the religious field' under his authority.[115] The Kongo elite had assembled their overlordship relatively recently, beginning in the early fifteenth century.[116] Although impressively centralised in certain ways, royal authority was probably still seen as dependent on local formulations of assent and structures of sacred power for their legitimacy.[117] As the Kongo kings tried to strengthen their hold in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and appointed officials were sent out to temporary leadership positions in the provinces, the status of local elites would have to be renegotiated: Perhaps their ritual role was enhanced as their political powers were curtailed.[118] Or we may discern a more general cultural template of authority in the stranger–kingship mould, by which ambitious rulers were held in check by counter-balancing forces – especially local ritual specialists with ancestral connection to the land.[119] One early seventeenth-century text refers to a local lord, the Mani Kabunga, as a pope-like figure for the region of the capital who was credited with powers of rainmaking and fertility. Every year he made a symbolic protest at the usurpation of his lands by the kings of Kongo.[120] Christianity was a cultic form that operated outside of such congealed constitutional compromises. For whatever reason, it is a striking feature of the history of Kongo thereafter that challenges to the crown rarely issued from the provinces but were focussed on grasping the crown at the centre.[121]

In this context, the practice of destroying ritual objects ('idols', 'fetishes') takes on a new aspect. Clearly, on one level, it was prompted

[115] On the 'consolidation of religious field': *UP* 124–31.

[116] Thornton 2020: 25–34 on previous entities incorporated by Kongo, although Thornton 2023: ch. 3 underlines the extent of royal centralisation before Afonso.

[117] In the seventeenth century, officials and chiefs could only be installed through the consent of priests (*kitomi*) who represented territorial deities (Balandier 1968: 252–3; Hilton 1985: 47; Thornton 2001a: 78–9). Office-holding in general was associated with magical arts in the region: Cavazzi 1668: 4 (bk. 3, ch. 1).

[118] Thornton (p. c. 9 November 2012).

[119] Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 139–221; MacGaffey 2018: 46, 52–3; also *UP* 123, 189–91.

[120] Cardoso 1969 [1624]: 18–19; Thornton 1987: 415; 2001b: 112–13. It is dubious whether this figure can be equated with the Mani Vunda, as Hilton and Cuvelier and others argued.

[121] Soyo's retrenchment in the mid-seventeenth century is an exception.

by Christian expectations.[122] In his letters, Afonso employs an entirely Christian discourse to describe his war on the idols: It is an expression of piety whose this-worldly consequences he only survived by divine grace. (He had perfectly grasped the peculiarly transcendentalist logic by which the expression of political foolhardiness in the temporal dimension may serve as a means of conveying perfection in the spiritual.) It is a top-down policy imposed by a fragile apex on a resistant elite.[123]

But the alacrity with which bouts of ritual object destruction were enacted in Kongo suggests that an indigenous religious logic was also at work. Recall that the first occasion was ordered by the Mani Soyo in 1491 immediately after his baptism. He was followed by Nzinga a Nkuwu after his baptism of the same year, and then by Afonso as governor of Nsundi before he became king.[124] These events are best considered, then, in terms of 'auto-iconoclasm', that is, internally validated rejections of cult practice and object.[125] Under the rubric of non-ethicised empirical religiosity, rites, ritualists and metapersons may be rejected if they are seen to have failed or become malignant. Moreover, communal feelings of disgust and anger towards the whole field of ritual objects involved in witchcraft (*kindoki* in Kikongo) – immanent power accessed to benefit individual ambitions and interests – might also give rise to collective anti-witchcraft sweeps. These became a particularly strong feature of Central African history.[126] In Kongo, the rite of baptism came to be interpreted as a powerful defence against witchcraft, as indicated by its local term, 'eating salt' (salt gave protection against witchcraft).[127] By unrolling a Christian cult, the Kongo kings were thus also providing a new form of protection for their subjects against the incursions of sorcery.[128]

[122] For iconoclasm as part of vassalage/baptism rites in Mbundu, see Heywood and Thornton 2007: 100.

[123] This depiction contrasts with Afonso's account (King of Kongo, 15 August 1526, MMA: 479–80) of the nobles after the battle: 'They were so ready to agree and so diligent that with their own hands they cut down the great, thick trees and carried the stones for this work on their own backs.'

[124] Pina 65, 123.

[125] Auto-iconoclasm is explained in *UP* 241.

[126] MacGaffey 1977: 190; Ranger 1993: 79. See Douglas 2003 [1963]: 245–50 on the Lele in the Belgian Kongo, 1950s: The Kabenga-benga cult repudiated all other forms of divination or sorcery.

[127] Hilton 1985: 98.

[128] Hilton 1985: 101.

Is it possible then that the objects targeted were only those associated with witchcraft and personal charms?[129] The sources, trading in an undifferentiated language of 'idols', are largely unhelpful on this point.[130] However, the most striking case is Afonso's decision in 1509 to burn 'the great house of the idols'. Clearly, the target here was not private fetish objects but the more public form of cult associated with deities wielding powers over the fertility or well-being of the kingdom at large. Indeed, the implication is that this cult had been tied to the monarchy.[131] Moreover, that Afonso was prepared to cut down the sacred grove in which the royal graves were located – and at a time when he claimed to be particularly beleaguered and lacked Portuguese support – suggests that he was mounting a full-scale attack on the old forms of establishing political legitimacy rather than simply rooting out malign forms of magic working.[132] There are indeed, claims in the sources that he continued the policy of idol-destruction after this point and even tried to enforce this as a kingdom-wide prohibition.[133]

On a popular level, the acquiescence of parts of the population in certain bouts of sacred object destruction (rather than their permanent abolition) may well have been driven by hopes for a more profound public renewal as expressed in later prophetic movements.[134] Around the turn of the eighteenth century, for example, a popular movement would coalesce around the indigenised Christian visions of Beatriz Kimpa Vita. Wyatt MacGaffey has suggested, 'The iconoclasm of the Antonines, their destruction of particularistic charms in favour of a transcendent spiritual authority, paralleled their demand for the

[129] Thornton 2013: 65–7. The broken idols represented in Afonso's coat of arms resemble later examples of *minkisi minkondi*, sword-bearing power objects or fetishes, according to Fromont 2014: 56–8. We know that witchcraft scares were salient in Afonso's time and could be used to delegitimise rulers because he was himself accused of it.

[130] Pigafetta 1881: 86–8 suggests a comprehensive policy of destruction in one month but is not reliable for details.

[131] These would be the 'territorial deities' in the terms of Heywood and Thornton 2007: 59.

[132] Cristovão Ribeiro, 1 August 1548, MMA XV: 161.

[133] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 311; and Rui de Aguiar, 25 May 1516, MMA: 362. (Compare the actions of Princess Nalumanisi, a daughter of Mutesa, Hastings 1994: 379).

[134] *UP* 249–50; MacGaffey 1986: 175, 188; Gray 1990: 5–6; Sarro 2008: 3.

restoration of a centralised kingdom.'[135] Indeed, it may be that the unusual radicalism of Afonso's Christian-influenced iconoclasm helped establish a strikingly continuous structure operative in the wider region up to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by which movements combining anti-witchcraft sweeps, healing, prophetic visions of societal renewal, political unification, Christian elements, ancestor veneration and the imagery of divinised kingship repeatedly arose.[136] Recently, the creative possibilities of this nexus have been evident in the Bundu dia Kongo movement, led by a former MP, Ne Muanda Nsemi, who presented himself as a divinised ruler (he has claimed, 'I am an archangel, a living ancestor, a divine dictator'). It aims to re-establish the ancient kingdom of Kongo and achieve a utopian social renewal by drawing on very diverse ideological resources including Christian and scientific discourse.[137] There is no need to assume that sixteenth-century movements were any less innovative.

Whatever the communal energies they harnessed, Afonso's iconoclasms would have also helped destroy alternative sources of ritual and therefore political power.[138] The foreign origins of the new cult, its extravagant claims of moral superiority and innate exclusivism, would have lent an unusually strong impetus to attempts to undermine the claims of elites associated with local shrines and charms.

On an institutional level, Afonso clearly sought to promote the church in Kongo as an extension of royal authority. However, the Christian clerisy is an ambiguous vehicle for royal pretensions. At the point of arrival, their absence of local ties and dependence on the king may be an attraction, but they may also come to be perceived as

[135] MacGaffey 1977: 188. The accession of Afonso was 'an iconoclastic and reintegrative movement of the same sort'.

[136] That is, since the first known example is Afonso's iconoclasm, it may be that the auto-iconoclastic potential of immanentism was supercharged by a lasting influence of transcendentalism. See Wilson 1973: 367–82 on movements following in the wake of Simon Kimbangu from 1921.

[137] www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39946722, accessed 17 May 2017; www.ibtimes.co.uk/drc-who-are-bundu-dia-kongo-sect-that-wants-establish-kingdom-kongo-1606560, accessed 15 May 2017; http://bundu-dia-kongo.org/history/messangers-prophets/muanda-nsemi.html, accessed 27 May 2017.

[138] For a similar interpretation, here see MacGaffey 1986: 199; Rüther 2009: 262. Compare Lubosi Lewanika's use of Christianity against Mbundu witch-finders and diviners in the 1880s, in Mainga 1976: 102, and tensions between pro-Christian chiefs and anti-centralising Nyau secret societies among the Chewa (Linden 1975).

subordinate to an international system administered from Europe. So much is evident from the tussles between the kings of Kongo and the authorities in São Tomé and Lisbon for control of the local church.[139] Crucially, however, the period in which Christianity was initially embedded under Afonso was also a period in which royal authority over it was strong. This was partly because Afonso had managed to have his own son, Henrique, installed as the first bishop of Kongo (the titular Bishop of Utica *in partibus infidelium*).[140] He returned to the Kongo in 1521 and formed an important partnership with his father in leading the project of Christianisation and exerting clerical discipline.[141] However, Afonso had other ambitions too, including gaining control over São Tomé, to which he was sending many children for instruction.[142] And Afonso and subsequent kings sought to use the papacy as a counterweight to São Tomé and Lisbon.

Afonso became attached to certain individuals who conformed to his vision of the church, such as 'Master Gil', who was called back to Lisbon in 1535 for operating without the authority of the bishop of São Tomé.[143] In general, the secular establishment appears to have been more accommodating than those who belonged to religious orders.[144] An exception was the order of the canons of St. Elói, who had first educated those Kongo men sent to Lisbon and who formed an important mission which arrived in 1509, even if their dissolute behaviour caused its own headaches.[145] After Henrique's death, he was replaced, in 1534, by a new Portuguese bishop based at São Tomé, who eventually sought to try to gain control in the 1540s during the reign of King Diogo I (1545–1561). This was the scene into which the Jesuits arrived and an underlying source of their recriminations

[139] Hilton 1985: 64; 1987: 292.
[140] On this title, see Bontinck 1979: 149–68, 161.
[141] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 295; documents in MMA 416–18; King of Kongo, 18 March 1526, MMA: 460.
[142] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 321.
[143] Almeida 2004: 867. Compare Manuel Afonso in Diogo's reign: Cristovão Ribeiro, 25 January 1549, MMA II: 220–1.
[144] Heywood and Thornton 2007: 67, 103.
[145] Jorge Cardoso, MMA: 86–9; Francisco de Santa Maria, MMA: 90–103; King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 297. Afonso requested more in 1526: King of Kongo, 18 March 1526, MMA: 463.

towards a church that had been quite thoroughly indigenised on an institutional level.[146]

The church was sustained by a centrally administered tithe system.[147] However, the most important vehicles for royal control were the noble youths trained as indigenous teachers, catechists, interpreters and *maestri* (masters of the chapels), whom Afonso began to distribute among the provinces.[148] These formed the meeting point between Christianity and the population at large. Indeed, they would have been pre-eminent in establishing the meanings of the new religion; it was for the rituals that one needed Europeans and ordained clergy.[149] As laymen they were under the control of the Crown rather than any formal structures of the church. The monarchy thereby exercised powers of patronage and control that it presumably did not hold over the complex and fluctuating web of pre-existing cult.[150]

Societal Recreation

In terms of the three modes of ruler appropriation set out in the introduction, the second mode materialised in Kongo with the baptisms of the Mani Soyo and Nzinga a Nkuwu. The new cult was adopted as a means of immanent power to enhance the strength of the king: hence the recurrent urge to jealously limit access to baptism, and its vulnerability to adverse empirical outcomes and arguments. But, as the discussion above suggests, with the accession of Afonso the third mode was attained, as Christianity was used to establish a new basis for the legitimacy of the throne. This, in turn entailed its dissemination, so that the novel theatre of kingship could be enacted before an appreciative audience. Typically, this third mode implies an attempt at broader socio-political transformation, and Kongo seems to be no exception.

Consider the following contrast: The Mani Soyo and Nzinga a Nkuwu were forced to yield baptism up to the wider nobility after

[146] Cornélio Gomes, 1551, MMA XV: 164–7.
[147] Rui d'Aguiar, 25 May 1516, MMA: 361; Thornton 1984: 161–2.
[148] Rui d'Aguiar, 25 May 1516, MMA: 361; King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 322.
[149] On the importance of these lay clergy: Thornton 1983: 164; Hastings 1994: 92; Heywood and Thornton 2007: 66.
[150] Pigafetta 1881: 87 emphasises the diversity of objects of worship. See also Thornton 1983: 65, 148 and Bethencourt 2011: 67.

they had tried to restrict it to themselves and a few of the highest office-holders, while Afonso forced the wider nobility to yield to his grand project of Christianisation:[151]

> We brought together all our brothers, sons, and nephews, and the sons of our vassals, so that there were at least four hundred young men and boys. We ordered some very high walls to be raised, with many thorns along the top so that they could not swing themselves over and flee. Then we handed them over to the said fathers [the canons of St. Elói] to teach them. We also raised more walls attached to these, so that the fathers could all be together as was prescribed by their order, with four houses inside.[152]

This is a striking image of conversion by decree: The elite youth are literally corralled into spiritual discipline and spatially fixed at the centre (and the foreign fathers corralled with them). Afonso clearly sought to confer the highest markers of Christian prestige upon his own extended family members, and the new faith became established as a defining feature of elite culture in Kongo from his reign onwards.[153]

From the start, the reception of Christianity had been one aspect of a broader reception of Portuguese culture – in its technological, material and social forms. There is no doubt, in other words, about the relevance of 'cultural appeal', as outlined in Chapter 1. It was Afonso's father, Nzinga a Nkuwu, who had first inaugurated this process with the requests in his 1487–1498 embassy for a broad array of craft knowledge – stimulated no doubt by what the first hostages had described of Lisbon – and which led to the dispatch of a 'microcosm of European society', in the words of Georges Balandier.[154] After his accession, Afonso sent his ambassador and cousin Pedro with a request for the means to build churches and educate his population. These found reply in Simão da Silva's embassy of 1512, which comprised five ships laden with masons, carpenters and other craftsmen, horses and all manner of Christian paraphernalia for the construction of churches and a palace.[155] Indeed, in a manner that deserves wider consideration, they carried a whole blueprint of European civilisation, which it was assumed the Kongo elite

[151] Pina 121–5 on attempted restriction.
[152] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 299–300; Damião de Góis, MMA: 374.
[153] Birmingham 1977: 548; Hilton 1985: 97–101; Heywood and Thornton 2007: 172–4.
[154] Balandier 1968: 42. [155] Góis, MMA: 222–5.

would want to reproduce. This included a coat of arms and banners for the royal family and a document describing how the court and administration could be organised along Portuguese lines.[156] Afonso was not, in fact, inclined to swallow this whole: He spat out those bits he considered indigestible by Kongo society, in particular the law codes of Portugal, which he found laughably restrictive.[157] But he retained an interest above all in those aspects that would enhance the status of the royal capital, the Kongo elite and the new religion: the selective adoption of European material culture, royal regalia and construction of stone churches and schemes of education.[158] He transformed Mbanza Kongo into a stone city surrounded by a great wall.[159] As noted above, the form of later ceremonial martial dances known as *sangamentos* indicates that Afonso's reign was fashioned in terms of profound societal transformation in the local imagination.[160]

Nor was education prized as merely a status boundary marker. Far more profoundly than was typical for regional rulers of this period, Afonso perceived the literacy and learning brought by Europeans as a significant desideratum. Again, the first steps were taken by his father. One of those who had been sent to Lisbon to 'be taught the things of the faith, studies of philosophy, the good arts and customs' was allowed to start teaching in Mbanza Kongo from 1491.[161] Afonso himself sent many nobles, including his brother and other close relatives, to Lisbon.[162] His calls for a more rigorous schoolmaster than Rui de Rego were answered by an energetic vicar, who set up a school for more than one thousand youths.[163] He never stopped demanding more teachers and personally took on the task of teaching, accompanied by his queen in later years.[164] Such schools were maintained by subsequent kings – by 1548, the Jesuits had a school for six hundred youths,

[156] Regimento of D. Manuel, 1512, MMA: 235, discussed in Rego 1959: 45; Vansina 1966: 49; Hastings 1994: 76.
[157] Góis in MMA, 375; Heywood and Thornton 2007: 61.
[158] Fromont 2014 (e.g., 26, 41, 47, 51, 122, 134) on adoption of European textiles, ceremonial swords and so on.
[159] Thornton 2000: 68.
[160] See above. Late-fifteenth-century-style European swords and red cloaks played a part in denoting the second (Christian) stage of society-foundation.
[161] Góis, MMA: 194–5, citing a letter of D. Manuel, 1504; Pina 136.
[162] Barros, MMA: 146; King of Kongo 5 October 1514, MMA: 298, 312.
[163] Góis, MMA: 373–4; King of Kongo 5 October 1514, MMA: 321–2.
[164] King of Kongo, 31 May 1515, MMA: 338; King of Kongo, 25 August 1526, MMA: 479–81; Dom João III, 1529, MMA: 533; Góis, MMA: 362.

for example – and these provided Kongo with a ruling class with some level of literacy, mostly in Portuguese.[165]

Anne Hilton has argued that all this served to facilitate the administration of central government, allowing the court to keep records of how much tribute was generally paid from each province, for example.[166] There remains much debate about how far Afonso initiated or merely built upon the more centralised features of the Kongo kingdom.[167] But literacy certainly gave Kongo kings the ability to control their relations with Europeans more effectively, to keep their own records of treaties and trading accounts, and to manage the flow of images and information to European centres without translators and intermediaries, going above the heads of governors in Luanda or São Tomé to authorities in Lisbon, Madrid or Rome.[168]

While European material and religious culture may have served to mark out the elite, there is no evidence that Afonso sought to restrict Christianity to a small circle of vassals. Instead he evidently intended its expansion.[169] The pattern, which was also followed by his successor Diogo, was to set up schools run by one of the 'boys of the chapel of the king' to teach Christian doctrine.[170] By 1561, then, every province in the kingdom had its church and teacher.[171] Furthermore, the emphasis on literacy and schooling indicates that Afonso was promoting a 'transcendentalist' emphasis on doctrinalised knowledge, the creation of the religious sphere as a matter of fixed truths and meanings rather than simply ritual behaviours.[172] Indeed, this missionary energy was rapidly directed beyond the kingdom proper, particularly to the Mbundu regions to the south and southeast, and Afonso even requested a Bull of Crusade for his expansionary wars.[173]

[165] Jacome Dias, 1 August 1548, MMA XV: 158–9. On literacy also, see Heywood and Thornton 2007: 61, 185; Lowe 2007: 101–3.
[166] Hilton 1985: 80–3; Iliffe 1995: 141. The Portuguese certainly saw themselves as providing literacy for governmental purposes: D. João III, 1529, MMA: 533.
[167] See, for example, Thornton 2018b versus MacGaffey 2018.
[168] King of Kongo, 4 March, 1516, MMA: 356 for Afonso demanding to see the Ordinances of Portugal to help resolve a dispute involving Portuguese.
[169] Góis, MMA: 374, on an early church in Soyo.
[170] Góis, MMA: 362.
[171] Sebastião de Souto, 1561, MMA II: 479–80; Hilton 1985: 65.
[172] Whitehouse 2000 for doctrinal religiosity.
[173] Thornton 2001a: 85–6; Heywood and Thornton 2007: 64, 165; Fromont 2014: 156.

This is to reject a strand of the historiography that presents Afonso's religious policy as merely a diplomatic façade erected to face towards Europe, or at most the maintenance of a syncretic or pluralist religious realm that had to be systematically concealed from European eyes.[174] This view is simply undercut by the consistency with which Afonso pressed for the Christianity of the Kongo to be refreshed from the lifeblood of mainstream Catholicism. He wanted to send as many as he could overseas for education in Lisbon and São Tomé, and in 1517 he even argued with the Portuguese king for the importance of Europe-based learning.[175] He begged for more priests from Portugal.[176] In 1526, Afonso wrote asking for fifty fathers, or more if they could be spared, these 'unguents for the open wounds of the people', and listed the various provinces that required them: 'Your Highness will know that many times we wrote to your father of holy glory of the great necessity that we have for many fathers to visit the great region of these Kingdoms and Dominions to clean up the great leprosy and filth of idolatry that there is here.' He later refers to this necessity 'given that we have people rustic and simple who do not know more than living or dying, and in order for them to understand the truth of our faith they need to be taught and indoctrinated'.[177] This is not the rhetorical strategy of a man seeking to draw a veil over the religious landscape. Naturally, as he made it clear in another letter of this year, he wished these priests, who would spread 'the sacraments, preaching, doctrine and penance' through all the parts of the kingdom, would proceed under the orders of himself and his son the bishop.[178] And, naturally, as so often, the resulting religious system represented a localisation of Christianity that was shaped by pre-existing forms. Yet Afonso and subsequent Kongolese kings remained consistently in favour of further missionaries from Europe.[179]

Afonso embarked on a project of self-Christianisation to match his ambitions for his subjects.[180] The appetite for learning eulogised by

[174] Hilton 1987: 292–3; discussed in Thornton 1983: 147.
[175] King of Kongo 27 May 1517, MMA: 406.
[176] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 322; King of Kongo, 25 August 1526, MMA: 477.
[177] King of Kongo 18 March 1526, MMA: 460, 462.
[178] King of Kongo 25 August 1526, MMA: 479–80.
[179] Heywood and Thornton 2007: 171–3.
[180] Compare Peel 2003: 233 on Kukomi.

Rui de Aguiar above is echoed in his own letters and their variations on the transcendentalist theme of this-worldly disparagement.[181] Naturally, this also reflected an epistolary strategy, but not one necessarily devised by Portuguese advisors.[182] The most important letter, of 1514, declared that it was composed in such imperfect Portuguese because it was drafted by a Kongolese student, João Teixeira, at a time when Afonso could not trust any Portuguese intermediary.[183] It is in this letter, for example, that he tells us of a great sermon that he delivered personally to his people on the arrival of the Canons of St. Elói in 1509, which began with Adam and Eve and moved on to summarise other aspects of Christian doctrine. It ended with Afonso making a reference to the old worship of sticks and stones, which God had in fact intended to be used to build houses and make fire. (Note again Afonso's characteristic equation between spiritual reform and more general modes of 'improvement'.)[184] Afonso also displayed a distinct concern for the details of Catholic clerical discipline.[185]

The complex story of what happened to sacred monarchy and Christianity in general after Afonso is not one that can be properly taken up here.[186] But Catholicism long maintained its position in legitimising the kings of Kongo, who succeeded in developing a form of sacred monarchy that inspired notable awe and loyalty from their subjects. After 1506, all sides in factional and succession disputes – of which there were many – held to it.[187]

Conclusion

Underlying many of the reasons offered here for Kongo's receptiveness is simply the early date at which its encounter with Christianity occurred. In terms of the functioning of religious diplomacy, for example, the Portuguese arrived at a point when they were the sole vehicles for the Atlantic trade, and indeed the sole point of access to a

[181] For example, King of Kongo, 31 May 1515, MMA: 336–8.
[182] Hilton 1987: 291.
[183] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 322. Santos 2002: 16.
[184] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 298.
[185] King of Kongo, 5 October 1514, MMA: 308–9.
[186] Fromont 2014 offers an important reconsideration of the long-term narrative, which has tended to see almost total evaporation in the eighteenth century.
[187] Succession disputes with the deaths of Afonso in 1543 and Diogo I in 1561; see Thornton 1981: 197.

whole other world of technology and commerce that had suddenly emerged from the blue. That world, and its promise in enhancing certain aspects of Kongo life and polity, was dramatically represented by a generous and comprehensive gift-giving, a display of civilisational advertisement that the Portuguese would never again reproduce.

Moreover, these boon-bearing ships intimated the ritual mastery of the Christians. This was assisted by the fact that the Portuguese were the initiators of a kind of 'first contact', breaking in upon a relatively circumscribed geographical–cosmologic worldview. It is plausible that the appearance and behaviour of the Portuguese connected them with the beings and forces of the underworld from which all power ultimately originated. But as well as the ancestors, the Portuguese also seemed to be connected with higher deities, including the highest *Nzambi a Mpungu*, whom they spoke of insistently – perhaps understood as a king, perhaps a metaperson and probably both. The Portuguese certainly proclaimed that their religious practices were at the heart of all they had to offer. And in this moment before the eruptions of the Reformation, Catholicism arrived with its immanentist dimensions firmly to the fore, as an array of rites and objects that would enhance royal authority and martial prowess. This chimed strongly with indigenous means of conceiving and testing ritual innovations. As for European reactions, a good portion of secular and even regular clergy were entirely willing to take the enthusiasm of the Kongo nobility at face value, to see baptism and ritual participation as the definitive markers of faith.

When it became clear to the people of Kongo that Christianity was not simply an additional and effective ritual resource but something that challenged the traditional forms of life, there was a backlash and Nzinga a Nkuwu's change of policy followed. This indicates, indeed, the kind of obstacle that Christianity faced elsewhere in Africa in moving from the second to the third modes of ruler conversion. If Afonso was able to overcome this by winning the succession battle of 1506, it was not so much the military as the ideological consequences that mattered in the long-term. The victory transformed the value of the new cult in the economy of ritual efficacy and became the mythic foundation for the monarchy thereafter. The events of 1506 generated a fund of charismatic authority that Afonso used to push through a new vision of the Kongo monarchy and society. The result was not simply the preservation of continuity under the merest

semblance of conversion but rather a sense of genuine rupture and societal re-foundation – albeit one configured through and facilitated by the structural tendencies of immanentism.

The case of Kongo also underlines the affinity between conversion and state construction. Kongo was unusually centralised or 'state-like' by regional standards, but it had formed relatively recently and with little precedent to draw on.[188] Given the ubiquitous and lasting equation between political office and the mastery of immanent forces in the region, it is likely that the kings of Kongo were moved to assert ritual superiority over subordinates whose position was bolstered by their own relations with the spirit world. In that case, Nzinga a Nkuwu and then Afonso surely saw the importation of Christianity as a means of consolidating a religious field that was not yet firmly under royal control. It is certainly true that Afonso exerted a strong grip over the new cult and was assisted by the willingness of many Portuguese clergy – in the early years – to align themselves with the interests of the Kongo monarchy. The conditions allowed for a deep indigenisation of Christianity, on the level of institutions, personnel and meanings, in a critical early phase of its establishment. If the further development of the Kongolese church came to suffer in certain ways from a lack of dedicated and highly trained missionaries, the first decades of its establishment may have benefitted significantly from their relative absence.

Moreover, Afonso was also allowed to develop a form of sacred kingship that retained certain features of divinised rule (connection to the royal ancestors, powers over life and death) and augmented them with a very special connection to the new cult. In the new dispensation, he was placed centre stage – almost, perhaps, like a prophet himself. Indeed, Afonso emerges from the evidence as something of a visionary, a man interested in ambitious schemes of transformation, and in the final analysis such personal qualities had their part to play too.

It was therefore in the nature of the initial encounters that European technological achievements, the benefits of seaborne trade and the power of Christianity all arrived as a single coherent whole. But it was not long before these things entered into dismal disassociation. The Portuguese crown was seen to have a weak hold over its countrymen on the ground, as the high-flown tenor of royal diplomacy in the

[188] Heywood and Thornton 2007: 58–9 on centralisation.

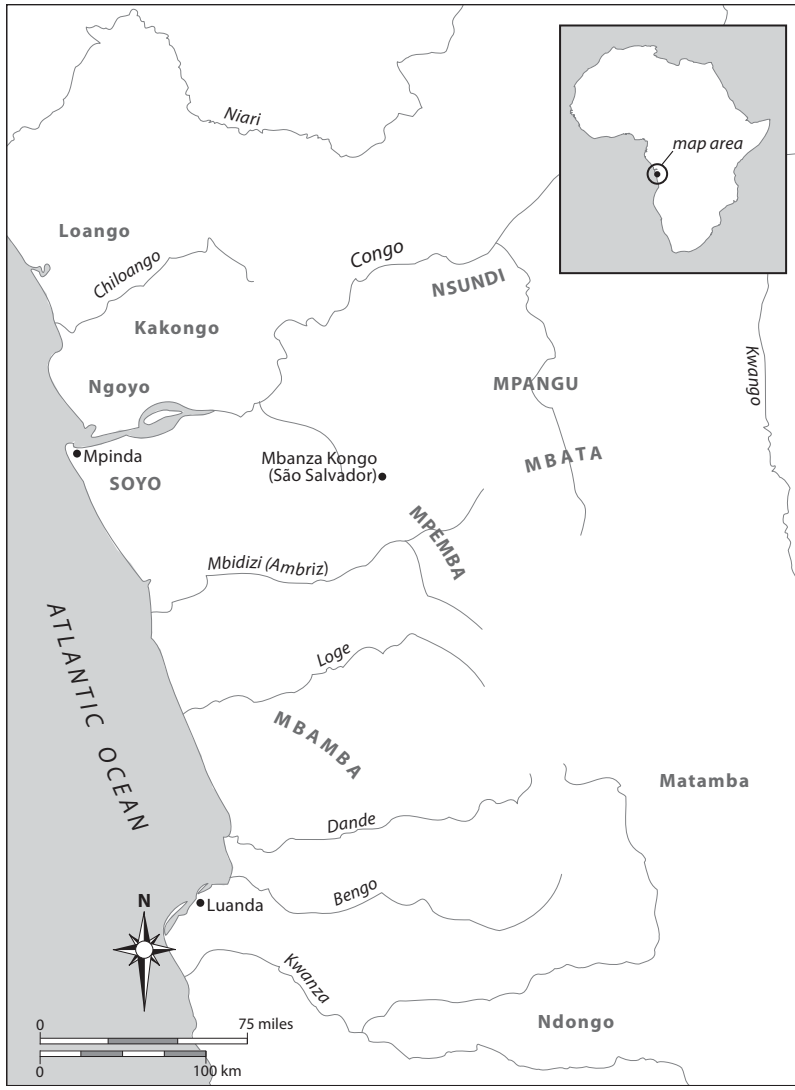
late fifteenth century was drowned out by the low farce of everyday Portuguese treasure-seeking emanating from São Tomé. Both Portuguese and Kongo royal monopolies over the Atlantic trade were threatened by the disintegrative forces of commercial activity, while the two crowns began to conflict over the monopoly of ecclesiastical positions. By the 1520s other European powers appeared and began to compete with each other.[189] It even became apparent that Catholicism was not the unrivalled form of Christianity. Thus, as the European presence multiplied and disaggregated, it quickly came to seem more mundane, messy and threatening to local political authority. By this time, however, Afonso had staked his sovereignty on a project of Christian socio-political transformation.

[189] King of Kongo, 25 August 1526, MMA: 475, on the arrival of the French.

KONGO

Figure 2.1 Coat of Arms of the Kings of Kongo, 1512. From *Livro da nobreza e da perfeição das armas dos reis cristãos e nobres linhagens dos reinos e senhorios de Portugal*, by António Godinho (1528–1541).

Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Lisbon, fol. 7, PT/TT/CR/D-A/ 001/20. Photograph and permission courtesy of the ANTT.



Map 2.1 Kongo.
Map by David McCutcheon.

3 *Money, Magic and Mastery in the Conversion of the Daimyo of Japan, 1560–1580*

To their patients the two Brothers said, 'We have come from far away as special messengers of the great King of South Barbary. Our country has forty-two provinces and is one hundred times larger than Japan. Because we worship Deus, no one in our land is poor, and there is no disease.'

Nanbanji Monogatari[1]

It was only in Japan that the Jesuit determination to convert members of the ruling elite in Asia met with substantial success, unlocking mass conversions among their subjects just as missiological theory predicted.[2] The principal actors were certain *daimyo* (warlords) located on the southern island of Kysuhu. Ōmura Sumitada (1533–1587), who held a petty domain in the Sonogi peninsula, was baptised in 1563. In nearby Shimabara, Arima Yoshisada was baptised in 1576, followed by his son Harunobu in 1580. Easily the most significant baptism, however, was that of Ōtomo Yoshishige (or Sōrin) of Bungo, which took place in 1578. Sōrin's son and heir Yoshimune also came close to baptism in that year but pulled back and was eventually baptised for a very brief spell as a Christian in 1587. These, together with the conversion of some elite families in the Gokinai (the region around Kyoto), formed the crucial breakthrough for the faith in Japan.[3]

The case of Japan has important implications for the theoretical arguments of this book, for here was a land in which transcendentalism, most notably in the form of Buddhism, had long been established. The following chapter will explore the ways in which this eventually

[1] Leuchtenberger 2013: 176. Original MS copy date of 1771.
[2] Valignano 1954 [1583]: 132.
[3] The affiliations of these daimyo houses might change thereafter, but, on a popular level, by 1614 it was clear that north-western Kyushu was the major heartland of Christianity. The Gokinai conversions are not a principal focus for these chapters but are discussed on pp. 129–31.

limited the impact of Christianity. This chapter, however, is devoted to showing how the three modes of ruler conversion were no less important to the warlords of Kyushu than they were to converting rulers in other parts of the world. The essential reason why this should be so – why they were uniquely receptive to Christianity among major Asian elites – lies in the unusual conditions of the *sengoku* or 'warring states' period (1467–c. 1600). When this era finally closed with the ascendency of warrior unifiers and the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, the window of Christian opportunity swung shut with a resounding thud.

Introduction: Religion and State

By the time the first Jesuit, Francis Xavier, arrived in 1549, rulership in Japan had long since disaggregated into a form of doubled diarchy. That is to say: The emperorship had first slipped into the ritualisation trap laid by the ascendant shoguns, who in turn had yielded real political agency to the rising daimyo. These warlords acquired great tracts of land, which they governed and taxed in newly intensive ways.[4] Meanwhile, monasteries, temples and popular Buddhist movements had also acquired substantial political authority and financial strength.

Europeans recognised the power of the daimyo as equivalent to that of 'kings', but their position lacked a certain symbolic dimension which that term normally implies.[5] Quite the opposite predicament was faced by the politically impotent emperor. In its early form, the office – better rendered as 'heavenly sovereign' or *tennō* – had clearly functioned as a form of divinised cosmic kingship.[6] But centuries had elapsed. It is unclear how much the emperorship mattered in the consciousness of most Japanese in the sixteenth century.[7] The imperial court retained a form of prestige among the elite through its unique evocation of historical continuity, its monopoly on the bestowal of status titles, its capacity to mediate in disputes and its pre-eminence as a centre for the

[4] Totman 1993: 18–20.
[5] On fluid ad hoc use of titles by Europeans, however, see Pinto 2000: 29–43.
[6] See *UP* 177 and Piggott 1997, passim; Ohnuki-Tierney 1991; Naumann 2000: 63–5; Paramore 2016a: 14; Teeuwen 2012: 72, 81; Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003: 3. Paramore 2016b notes the limits to the Confucian model here.
[7] Ruoff 2001: 18.

cultivation of high culture and aesthetic refinement.[8] Some major rituals had been cut back, but ritual observances still bulked large in the annual activities of the emperor.[9] These included rites that were also evidently tied to the prosperity of the realm, such as the Festival to the Gods of Heaven and Earth.[10] Yet the extent to which the religious function of the emperor carried real significance is a matter of some ambiguity.[11] It is intriguing that some of the first news that the Jesuits received about him strongly conveyed an aura of sanctity: He was 'considered with so much veneration as one of their idols, and is worshipped as such. He cannot put his feet on the ground and if he does so, he is deprived of his office.'[12] On some level, the symbolic import of the office never truly collapsed; otherwise there seems little reason why the unifiers of Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa would not have simply brushed it aside once their coercive supremacy was established.[13]

Early on in its formation the emperorship was profoundly influenced by Buddhism.[14] Yet in certain ways it held itself aloof: It was never *completely* defined by Buddhist discourses and imagery.[15] This might stand as a symbol of the place of Buddhism in Japan more generally: profoundly embedded and yet not all-encompassing in its hegemony.[16] The interdependence of secular rule and sangha was indeed a fundamental principle expressed in the *ōbō-buppō* formulation (normally

[8] Butler 2002: 3, 294 emphasises sheer inertia. On status titles: Cosme de Torres, 8 October 1561, Bungo, Cartas, f. 74v.

[9] Deal and Ruppert 2015: 174.

[10] Butler 2002: 77–89, 143, and 128–34 notes mediatory function.

[11] Kuroda 1996: 375 argues that with the development of *Shinkoku* thought in the Kamakura period, the divine descent of the emperor was stressed such that he 'acquired a pronounced ideality indistinguishable from that of a divine being'. Amino 2012: 268 sees a decline in the sacredness of the emperorship around the fourteenth century. Butler 2002: 13 downplays the significance of the term *tennō* in our period and the ritual role of the office (288–9), while Conlan 2015 (and note 2016: 92) provides compelling evidence that court rites had real political significance as late as 1551.

[12] Cosme de Torres, 8 October 1561, Bungo, Cartas, f. 74v; Luís Fróis, 20 February 1565, Miyako, Cartas, f. 173. On not touching the ground in other cases of cosmic kingship: *UP* 184–5.

[13] Instead, they both re-established and subordinated it – as with Buddhism. Wakita 1982: 348.

[14] Totman 1993: 16; DuBois 2011: 58.

[15] See particularly Teeuwen 2012: 68–9, and Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003: 23.

[16] McMullin 1984: 5.

translated as 'Royal law'–'Buddhist law').[17] In this sense, Japan is more comparable with Buddhist societies of the Indic world than with China.[18] But there are several important ways in which the situation in Japan, and to some extent East Asia more generally, may be contrasted with the Theravada model that we shall encounter in Ayutthaya. With due consciousness of the high level of generalisation involved, we may note:

(1) In Japan, the emperorship had maintained a certain conceptual distinction from Buddhism, as noted above, because of its prior formulation according to indigenous immanentist and Chinese sources. (2) Buddhism always shares ground with other ritual and philosophical traditions, but in Japan local immanentist practices developed a more self-conscious identity such that by the fifteenth century they could already be distinguished as Shintō.[19] Furthermore, in common with China, Buddhism also had to live alongside the quasi-transcendentalist tradition of Confucianism.[20] (3) On an institutional level, Japanese Buddhism retained more independence from state supervision than in Theravada lands, where the sovereign was the ultimate guarantor of monastic purity and discipline.[21] (4) Buddhism had separated into distinct schools, sects and sub-sects, giving rise to both institutional and theological plurality. This was the result of certain intellectual tendencies within Mahayana Buddhism but may also be related to its relative detachment from the state. (5) Buddhism had generated forms of popular lay salvationism which gained mass appeal and in their radical forms could be perceived as a major threat to secular authority; some even took on quasi-monotheistic qualities.

All of these will be seen to be relevant to the question of daimyo conversions, and there may be a case for adding a sixth, which is that Japanese religious culture can appear strikingly immanentist in its

[17] See it referenced in a 1562 shrine vow by Ōtomo vassals: *ZTHO*S 21, document 223, p. 114–15. According to McMullin 1984: 23–4, *buppō* takes in the major temple-shrine complexes (incorporating Shintō elements), while Kuroda and Stone 1996: 276 explain that *ōbō* referred to worldly authority conceptualised in Buddhist terms. Baskind and Bowring, eds. 2015: 189 use 'King's Law'.

[18] Teeuwen and Rambelli 2012: 63.

[19] Teeuwen and Rambelli 2012: 62.

[20] Confucianism was foundational in China in a way that it was not in Japan until perhaps the seventeenth century. Japan inherited from Tang China, however, a conceptual distinction of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism. Paramore 2016a: 7.

[21] This is *not* generalisable to China, which had repeatedly attempted to subordinate Buddhism from the Tang period onwards.

fundamental orientation. Something like this has repeatedly been observed by many scholars, including sociologists of religion influenced by Axial Age theory such as Shmuel Eisenstadt and Robert Bellah, who referred to Japan as a case of 'submerged transcendence'.[22] A similar approach was taken by Joseph Kitagawa, amongst others, who saw the emperorship as an 'immanental theocracy'.[23] Neil McMullin notes that, in early and medieval Japan, rituals were largely directed towards specific goals such as safe childbirth, while clerics whose rituals were considered effective were rewarded with lavish patronage.[24] This literature may acknowledge the presence of transcendentalist traditions, but it emphasises how much they had to cater to immanentist needs and modes of thought in order to thrive.

This is certainly worth noting, for it resonates with the analysis of daimyo conversions developed in this chapter: It may help explain why the role of immanent power and this-worldly turns of fortune come through the evidence so strongly. However, from the perspective developed in *Unearthly Powers*, in a fundamental sense Japan is quite typical in this regard, and Chapter 4 will underline that the transcendentalist qualities of religious life in Japan were no less fundamental to explaining the fortunes of Christianity. As the Jesuit and interpreter João Rodrigues put it, the intense religiosity of the people of Japan was 'not only to obtain temporal benefits such as long life, health, wealth, prosperity and children, and other such things for which they ask their false gods, but also even more to obtain with all their hearts salvation in the next life'.[25]

Japan was set apart from other Buddhist societies, however, by the way immanentist practices coalesced into a distinct tradition, Shintō, which would eventually even rival Buddhism for status. At the same time, there were myriad ways in which the two forms had merged: As ever, the local deities were subject to hegemonic incorporation, both recognised by the Buddhist ontology and yet also subordinated to its

[22] Eisenstadt 1996; Bellah 2003: 7–13; 1957; Higashibaba 2001: 84, fn. 17, on the philosopher Nakamura Hajime's emphasis on the 'this-worldliness' underlying all Japanese spirituality. See also the brief but sensible discussion in Duara 2015: 189–90.

[23] Kitagawa 1987: xii; Ohnuki-Tierney 2005: 223. Reader and Tanabe 1998 emphasises 'worldly benefits'; Bitō and Nakai 1991: 375 underlines a 'this-worldly coloration' but means something slightly different to immanentisation.

[24] McMullin 1984: 11–12. [25] Rodrigues 2001: 126.

higher vision.[26] By the twelfth century many kami were seen as emanations or avatars of bodhisattvas and thus ultimately of the Buddha. This was the theory of *honji suijaku* (original nature, trace manifestation).[27] Jesuits noted that the Japanese habitually evoked 'the kami (gods) and hotoke (bodhisattvas or buddhas)' in a single phrase, and their respective properties must have often blurred into each other.[28] (It is interesting to note, however, that European reports indicate that the kami were understood to have been the gods of Japan before the arrival of Buddhism and that they were looked to for immanent boons while the hotoke looked after salvation.[29]) Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines now often occupied the same physical space. The process by which kami worship had been subsumed into Buddhism can seem from this angle as complete as it was in say Sri Lanka or Siam. And yet on one level it cannot have been *quite* so complete, for otherwise the emergence of an increasingly self-conscious and assertive 'Shintō', especially as envisaged by Yoshida Kanemoto (1434–1511), is difficult to comprehend.[30] It may be that the particular process of *honji suijaku* as developed by esoteric Buddhist monks set in motion a dignification of the kami that ironically culminated in a claim of superiority.[31] It may also reflect the survival of central features of the emperorship in its pre- or non-Buddhist form. If so, then it was an enduring model of divinised kingship that halted the complete Buddhist colonisation of the religious field.

The 'combinatory' field of religion in Japan was not a product of non-reflective syncretism.[32] Buddhism, emergent Shintō and Confucianism were engaged in strategies of mutual rhetorical contradistinction as well as patterns of mutual influence.[33] Moreover, even within Buddhism there was great diversity. The oldest established sects were Tendai and Shingon, esoteric schools that had received lavish patronage by the aristocracy and the state, providing immanentist power (healing, protection) conceptualised and facilitated by Tantric-influenced

[26] See *UP* 76–7; Josephson 2012: 26; Duara 2015: 48; Bocking 2000: 175.
[27] Teeuwen 2000; Ooms 1985: 175; McMullin 1989: 5.
[28] Higashibaba 2001: xxx; Reader and Tanabe 1998.
[29] Luís Fróis, 27 August 1585, Nagasaki, Cartas II, f. 155; Fróis II, 49, which supports the comments of Bitō and Nakai 1991: 379.
[30] See Bowring 2005: 344–62 (thirteenth- and fourteenth-century origins); Josephson 2012: 99; Teeuwen and Rambelli 2012: 75.
[31] Teeuwen 2000: 96. [32] Dolce 2012.
[33] Duara 2015; Ooms 1985: 16, 116–28.

theologies.[34] These temples were anciently established, and many had become very wealthy, enjoying tax privileges and even building up their own military forces. Among various reactions against esotericism was the growing importance of Zen Buddhism. Now, there were many ways in which Zen, too, was profoundly immanentised, which was surely an important element of its appeal to the warrior class, as considered below.[35] Yet, it also purveyed a highly intellectualised perfection of transcendentalism, returned the discipline of meditation to its foundational place and developed a sceptical approach towards popular religious understandings.[36]

Altogether different were the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period that developed simplified, egalitarian soteriologies denying the association between the monastic life and salvation. The doors of salvation were thrown open to the common man and woman, and the result were theologies and behaviours that resemble monotheism in certain ways. The Jōdoshū (Pure Land school) founded by Hōnen (1133–1212), for example, cultivated a devotion to Amida (Buddha Amitābha) as a compassionate saviour figure who could grant a rebirth in a paradisiacal afterlife. This soon gave rise to an important splinter group, the Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land School), which looked to the teachings of Shinran (1173–1262). The Hokkeshū founded by Nichiren (1222–1282) was a separate reaction, which insisted on the exclusive authority of the Lotus Sutra. These movements created the basis for popular leagues (*ikki*), associations of warriors, villages and towns joining together in self-government.[37] The name of the *Ikkō ikki* (Single-Minded League), which developed around the Jōdo Shinshū leadership of Rennyo (1415–1499) at Honganji, indicates the strength of the devotion and discipline that could result.[38] When Christianity arrived in Japan it found versions of Buddhism that had evolved into forms that looked remarkably like itself – a fact that would not always work to its advantage.

[34] On tantrism in the immanentist–transcendentalist scheme, see *UP* 94–5.
[35] Amstutz 2012: 155 helpfully lists these 'materialities'.
[36] And each broad school contained sub-divisions, Tendai between the Mountain Gate and Temple Gate lineages, for example, and Zen between the Sōtō and Rinzai schools.
[37] Kawamura 2009: 154–6; Kasahara, McCarthy et al. 2001: 230–2; Ooms 1985: 21–2, 31–3, 293; Souyri 2001: 181–215.
[38] Tsang 2007; Bowring 2005: 423–30.

Indeed, there was another sense, too in which religiosity in Japan was moving towards something strangely analogous to monotheism in certain ways.[39] It had long been considered that divine largesse was bestowed on the just.[40] This understanding was shaped by notions of the Mandate of Heaven (*Tenmei*) and the Way of Heaven (*Tentō*), which had been imported along with some basic Confucian notions early in Japanese history and indeed influenced the Japanese emperorship in its formative period.[41] But it was in the sixteenth century itself that Confucianism in the form of *Tentō* thought acquired a more significant hold over the imagination of the daimyo.[42] It was then a concept in flux, being variously and flexibly understood and debated.[43]

The rough comparability of *Tentō* to the enduring Chinese notion of the Mandate of Heaven is clear: Both are governing forces that determine the fortunes of human beings individually and collectively according to an ethical logic. But to what extent was it also close to the Christian deity?[44] Heaven was certainly a more transcendent, less personal entity than the Christian God.[45] In another sense, however, it acted as an analogous judgemental supernatural agent.[46] The moral dimension to human fortune here certainly conveys a transcendentalist quality.[47] Yet in practice it could function like an amoral concept such as fate or the Polynesian concept of *mana* – for victory was its own

[39] Deal and Ruppert 2015: 179. 'Buddhist and Shintō lineages had already begun to pursue the possibility of an ultimate deity, given Rennyo's strongly theistic bent and certain trends in Shintō thought.'

[40] Conlan 2003: 179.

[41] Elisonas 1973: 5; Piggott 1997.

[42] Bitō and Nakai 1991: 396, 404–5; Butler 2002: 290; Ooms 1985; Paramore 2016a: 42–5.

[43] Honda Sado no Kami Masanobu (1538–1616), a counsellor of Ieyasu, confessed, 'I spent several years without understanding the Way of Heaven any better.' He began, 'The way of heaven is not a god and neither is it a Buddha; it is the lord between heaven and earth, but it has no body': Elisonas and Lamers 2011: 43–4; also, Rodrigues 2001: 363.

[44] Bowring 2015: 32; Deal and Ruppert 2015: 179. Naitō 1976 compares *Tentō* and the Christian God.

[45] Consider the criticism of Fabian Fukansai in 1620: 'Dislikes, likes and personal preferences are personal feelings. Deus, who has love and hate, is unworthy of consideration' (Hibbard and Hiraishi, trans. 1963: 11); compare contemporaneous criticism in China by Xu Dashou: Meynard 2017.

[46] Kanda 2010: 53–4.

[47] Kanda 2014: 75–7. *ZTHOS*, 21, document 223, pp. 114–15, for a 1562 shrine supplication; Kanda 2014: 97 for a 1579 letter of Oda Nobunaga.

guarantor of Heavenly approbation.[48] Like *mana* it was at once a champion of the status quo and a justification for the violent overthrow of superior by inferior. As a response to the exaggerated vicissitudes of the period, it was then rather complete, expressing both the reality of churn and the fantasy of order.

Money and Might

It was necessary that they be first fattened on the pleasure and hopes of their interests.[49]

Nowhere is the significance of 'religious diplomacy' more apparent than in Japan.[50] Alessandro Valignano, the Jesuit Visitor to the East, was as clear as day about it:

Your Reverence must understand that after the grace and favour of God, the greatest help we have had hitherto in securing Christians is that of the Great Ship [he goes on to explain that this applies to the lower Kyushu region but not in Bungo or Kyoto where the ship does not visit]. . . . as the benefits they [the lords of Japan] derive when the ships come to their ports are very great, they try hard to entice them to their fiefs. And since they have convinced themselves that they will come to where there are Christians and churches, and whither the padres wish them to come, it therefore follows that many of them, even though they are heathen, seek to get the padres to come thither.[51]

Valignano was here echoing the analysis of his predecessor as superior of the mission, Francisco Cabral, and three years later he reiterated it in order to encourage the Portuguese to play their part in the game of religious diplomacy more consistently – for the practicalities of the mission depended on it.[52] The only exceptions to this dance of material interest were the conversions of the lords of the region around Kyoto (also known as Miyako).[53]

[48] Compare too Christian Providence, or *fortuna* (Elisonas 1973: 5), and see *UP* 217.
[49] Fróis I, 298.
[50] Except perhaps the conversion of city-states of maritime Southeast Asia to Islam, see Chapter 10. On Japan: Boxer 1951; Elisonas 1973; Üçerler 2018: 310; Moran 1993: 102; De Luca 2008: 145–7; Vu Thanh 2016: 189.
[51] *Sumario De Las Cosas De Japón* of 1580 cited in Boxer 1951: 93.
[52] Valignano 1954 [1583]: 168–9. Cabral cited in Zampol D'Ortia 2017: 229. See also Fróis I, 298.
[53] See below pp. 129–31.

Two factors were responsible for creating such a clear dynamic. The first was the Darwinian context of the warring states era in which any advantage won from trading profits or Portuguese military support could be the difference between survival and destruction. The second was that the Portuguese had finally secured a grip on an intra-Asian trading route. The Chinese emperor had prohibited trade with Japan as a result of piratical activity on the southern coast. Luís Fróis (1532–1597) saw this as an act of Providence, for it meant that, particularly after the establishment of Macao in 1557, the Portuguese were able for a time to exercise a virtual monopoly in this area servicing the great appetite for Chinese silk and other luxury items in Japan by the annual dispatch of one carrack (or *nau*).[54] The Jesuits themselves were also importuned to act as bullion brokers, exchanging Japanese silver for Chinese gold.[55] In the early days of Portuguese trade, the firearms they brought were also seized upon, although within a year or so Japanese artisans had learned how to make them.[56]

The Jesuits had had top-down conversion in mind since Xavier's time.[57] It was because of his association with the Portuguese ships that Xavier had initially found welcome in Kagoshima from the daimyo of Satsuma, Shimazu Takahisa, and because the ships then went elsewhere that he was then pushed out.[58] They had gone to Hirado, in the province of Hizen, where Xavier followed to receive a more enduring welcome from the lord, Matsuura Takanobu (1522–1599).[59] Matsuura did not convert and eventually also ejected the Jesuits in 1558, although one of his vassals, Koteda Yasutsune (d. 1582), was baptised as Dom António.[60]

The Jesuits had to move on again, and Cosme de Torres sent out feelers for other lords who might be drawn by the prospect of the Portuguese carrack on the horizon. The Portuguese found a promising

[54] Fróis I, 298. The Portuguese were more reliable because they could resist pirate attacks. On the extent of Japanese involvement in the trade: Oka 2021.
[55] Boxer 1951: 111–12.
[56] Boxer 1951: 96.
[57] Ribeiro 2006: 46–7; Boxer 1951: 80; Moran 1993: 68. Xavier had arrived with Cosme de Torres, Fernandez and three Japanese who had studied at St. Paul's in Goa.
[58] Letters by 'King of Cangoxima', 1562, in Cartas, f. 112–15; Valignano 1944: 165–8. Elisonas 1991: 310.
[59] Matsuura Takanobu, 16 October 1555, Hirado, Cartas, f. 37. Clulow 2010: 20–1.
[60] Fróis I, 113–14. Fróis I, 116: The ejection of Gaspar Vilela dissuaded the Portuguese ship from then calling in at the port. On date: Ribeiro 2006: 49.

harbour at Yokoseura in the Sonogi peninsula, in the territory of a minor lord, Ōmura Sumitada, who was contending with internal factionalism. He was duly approached with the lure of 'great spiritual and temporal profits'.[61] This was the fundamental context for the first conversion by an elite figure in Japan (there is some debate as to whether his status was high enough to warrant the title 'daimyo').[62] The carrack visited there in 1562 followed by other Portuguese vessels, and in May or June 1563 he was baptised.

Sumitada paid for this external boon in the coin of internal instability: He barely escaped a coup a few months after his baptism and was the subject of continuing attacks from within and without. His sources of strength remained the loyalty of his Christian population and the profits and military succour deriving from his alliance with the Portuguese. When the carrack was lost at sea it stimulated a particularly serious attack in 1573 or 1574 by his enemies, who anticipated an immediate deterioration in his strength as a consequence, and Sumitada was only saved by the arrival of Portuguese ships.[63] His great dependence on the Portuguese was what lay behind his donation in 1580 of the port of Nagasaki to the Jesuits – which might otherwise have been swallowed up by his adversary Ryūzōjï Takanobu.[64]

Ōmura Sumitada's brother Arima Yoshisada (1521–1576) was lord of the neighbouring Takaku region of Hizen. He first formed an association with the Jesuits cognizant of the prospect of the Great Ship, allowing missionaries to begin work in 1563. In April of the last year of Yoshisada's life he had finally converted and left thousands of converts among his subjects when he died.[65] His son Arima Harunobu (1567–1612) began his rule by persecuting Christians, for reasons considered below. But he was also threatened by local dissent and the advances of Ryūzōji Takanobu. Valignano then cannily steered the carrack to call at his port of Kuchinotsu in 1579.[66] After three of his fortresses went over to the enemy in early 1580, Valignano arranged for provisions and military supplies to be directed his way.

[61] Fróis I, 270–1; Valignano 1944: 444–6; Elisonas 1991: 323–4.
[62] Elisonas 1991: 323.
[63] Fróis II, 380; Anon. Japan, 1564, Cartas f.150v–2v, 150v–1; Schutte 1980, I, ii, 24.
[64] Elisonas 1991: 327–9; Elisonas 1973: 90–2.
[65] Fróis I, 298–304, II, 449–54, and see pp. 102–3 below.
[66] Fróis III, 136; Schutte 1980, I, ii, 238.

As Fróis saw, Arima simply had no other option but to unite his interests with the Portuguese and his uncle.[67] He was baptised as Dom Protásio on 3 April 1580. By that time this peninsular region in western Kyushu had generated a discernible momentum towards Christianity.[68]

But what of Ōtomo Yoshishige, the most important daimyo convert, whom Valignano had excluded from his list of lords dragged towards the light by the passage of the carrack? Elsewhere Valignano was willing to concede that Sōrin had obtained other material advantages from his relations with the Jesuits.[69] His war with the Mōri turned into a maritime struggle involving the use of corsairs. In 1567–1568, he wrote letters to the bishop based in Macao, asking for another cannon to be sent by the Portuguese governor to replace one lost at sea, and for the Portuguese to redirect the saltpetre trade from Yamaguchi to his own territory.[70] In a rare explicit comment on such matters from a Japanese source, a group of retainers claimed to Yoshimune that Sōrin's 'favour for this religion is for no other reason than to use it as a means of attracting the southern barbarian ships and to obtain treasures from them'.[71]

This cannot amount to an explanation for his actual baptism in 1578 (for mere favour had already won such rewards). Nor was his religious policy ever dictated by desperation like those of the lesser two lords. But the retainers' comment is surely part of the broader picture. That panorama must take in some of the 'early modern' features of Bungo as a cosmopolitan, extraverted and maritime-focussed polity. The feats of the Portuguese would have registered with some force in this setting, and Sōrin was exposed to them from an impressionable age: He was only sixteen when he intervened on their behalf with his father.[72] When he took power, he was intent on extending trade networks across East and Southeast Asia, including Cambodia and Thailand in the 1570s, as Kage Toshio's work has shown.[73] He took

[67] Fróis III, 133–45; Elisonas 1991: 333–4.
[68] A baron in Amakusa, Shigehisa, was baptised as Dom Miguel in 1571, and some neighbours followed: Fróis II, 222–32; IV, 497–8.
[69] See Elisonas 1991: 317; Kanda 2014: 81–2.
[70] Ōtomo Yoshishige, 18 November 1567, Bungo, Cartas, ff. 249v–50, and 13 September 1568, Bungo, Cartas f. 250.
[71] In circa 1580: *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, pp. 237–8.
[72] Fróis III, 24, and Rodrigues 2001: 64.
[73] Kage 2015: 27; Oka 2018: 165–6.

pleasure in conducting embassies and letters with Goa, Macao and even Lisbon.

Even for the lesser lords, 'religious diplomacy' certainly does not tell the whole story of their conversion. But it is difficult to deny the unflattering analysis of the missionaries themselves: that they had first rolled into the affairs of Kyushu on a providential flow of Chinese silk.

Immanent Power: The Whims of Heaven and the Things of War

I trust in Hachiman, god of battles and the king of Bungo trusts in the God of the Christians, and we shall see which can do more.

Ōtomo Sōrin reporting what the Lord of Satsuma had told him during the siege of Usuki in 1586[74]

In keeping with the general significance of immanentism in *sengoku* period religiosity, the Jesuits frequently found a popular willingness to credit them with thaumaturgic powers.[75] Higashibaba Ikuo has suggested that they might be taken as the broad equivalents to *yamabushi*, practitioners of Shugendō.[76] The *yamabushi* owed some of their reputation to the fact that they were transgressive figures outside the normal social order, and the Jesuits surely aroused similar apprehensions of the exotic.[77] They were quick to encourage the idea that their crucifixes and prayers, their holy water in particular, could heal the sick.[78] As always and everywhere, desperate medical situations demanded flexible experimentation with new ritual practices.[79] The genre of anti-Christian texts that developed in the seventeenth century

[74] According to his confessor, Padre Laguna, relayed in Fróis IV, 379. 'And because I saw that the things of Bungo had poor success, I feared … some damage to his faith.'

[75] See Strathern 2020a for a fuller examination of the issues dealt with in this section. My work here is indebted to that of Higashibaba Ikuo, Hino Hiroshi and Kanda Chisato.

[76] Higashibaba 2001: 47.

[77] Leuchtenberger 2013: 13–14. See *UP* 234–6 on the *mana* of the exotic.

[78] Fróis I, 213–14, copying the letter by Luís de Almeida, 25 October 1562. Duarte da Silva, 20 September 1555, Bungo, Cartas f. 45v. Also see Hino 2004: 826, 830; Higashibaba 2001: xiv; 32–8; Fujitani 2019: 83.

[79] Fróis II, 429; Gaspar Coelho, 5 October 1575, Ōmura, Cartas ff. 352v–3. On elite conversions related to healing: Luís de Almeida, 20 October 1566, Sakai, Cartas, ff. 216–17; Aires Sanches, 8 September 1576, Hirado, Cartas f. 373; Fróis V, 163–5.

seems to preserve a memory of this in their portrayal of the missionaries as sorcerers endowed with an uncanny gift for healing in particular.[80] One reason for this was their willingness to diagnose demonic possession and overpower it through exorcism, a practice that resonated with pre-existing assumptions about health and well-being.[81] The Jesuits used the outlandish actions of the possessed – crying out for interpretation and resolution – to articulate a testimony of the superiority of Christian ritual and the deity it supplicated. Interrogating the possessed through leading questions, the Jesuits rendered their cries the laughter of demons scorning the feeble attempts of the other ritualist specialists.[82] Local gods were re-described as capricious devils in the process.

Christianity was no less significant as a form of war magic. Samurai had long gone to battle protected by sacred accoutrements and symbols to secure *myōjo*, the 'otherworldly assistance' provided by the kami and hotoke.[83] From the 1560s, converted samurai – or those merely willing to experiment – treated Christian symbols in the same manner, going to war with the cross painted on their armour and their banners, medallions of IESUS and MARIA on their helmets and Catholic rosaries in their hands.[84] As for how the outcome of battles were interpreted, Way of Heaven thought already strove to explain the rise and fall of warrior houses by reference to the judgement of the divine; Christian Providentialist polemics uniting military fortune with divine agency fitted quite smoothly into this paradigm.[85]

[80] Leuchtenberger 2013: 16, 23.

[81] Existing ideas of the demonic: Reider 2010: xix; Josephson 2012: 32; Kawamura 2009: 165–6: Both Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism functioned as a mechanism of release from generalised fear of sorcery.

[82] Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 355v–63v, 360v–36; Gaspar Coelho, 5 October 1575, Ōmura, Cartas, ff. 352v–3, João Francisco, 14 September 1575, Ōmura, Cartas f. 355; Aires Sanches, 8 September 1576, Hirado, Cartas f. 373.

[83] See Rodrigues 1603, f. 161 on *myōjo*, and note Conlan 2011: 131; Conlan 2003: 179; Hino 2004: 819. For Ōtomo supplications of the Usa Hachiman shrine in 1561, *Ōita-ken shiryō*, vol. 24, documents 417, 418; and the letter by Bekki Akitsura and others, the thirteenth day of the ninth month, 1562, *ZTHOS* 21, document 223.

[84] João Francisco, 1 September 1580, Miyako, Cartas, f. 480v; Luís Fróis, 9 September 1577, Usuki, Cartas, f. 391; Fróis IV, 144; and Hino 2004: 808–17.

[85] Kanda 2010: 60–1. Elisonas 1973: 41 citing Valignano 1586. Compare Fabian Fukansai, Baskind and Bowring 2015: 190.

Although the following narratives are based largely on Jesuit letters and chronicles, they reflect the broad lines of a shared logic of 'empirical religiosity'.[86] Note that the missionary texts frequently disclose the way this logic *undermined* their mission – a strangely masochistic strategy if we are inclined to emphasise the exhortatory function of such sources. Moreover, some telling comments in Japanese sources confirm its centrality to all sides.[87]

Ōmura and Arima: Celestial Crucifix and Mortal Illness

A closer examination of the period leading up to the baptism of Ōmura Sumitada indicates that his desire to access immanent power was pivotal, for both the creation and the destruction of life had been playing on his mind. The turning point had taken place one night in April 1563, during a conversation with the Spanish lay-brother Juan Fernández:

> He said that he would finally deal with the virtues of the name IESU and the mysteries of the cross, whereupon the Brother gave him an account also of the history of the Emperor Constantine regarding the cross. He greatly enjoyed hearing these things and the brother could see clearly by the particular questions he asked that he took away understanding.[88]

It was the day after this discussion and its reflections on the battle-winning cross that Sumitada sent a message to Cosme de Torres saying that he now understood the new faith – and that if the Lord would give him a son and heir he would become Christian.[89] He carried around a gold crucifix from this point on. When he was eventually baptised at the end of May or June, it was on the eve of a hurried departure to war. The new Dom Bartolomeu requested the support of Jesuit prayers – for the coming battle and for the safe labour of his wife.[90]

[86] For source criticism of Fróis, see Strathern 2020a: 250–1, which draws attention not only to his expertise in Japanese and access to information but also to his personal, rhetorical and Providential inclinations. Note Rubiés 2020 on Fróis's engagement with Buddhism.

[87] Fróis I, 52; III, 93, 118–20; IV, 292; Valignano 1954: 271–81.

[88] Luís Fróis, 14 November 1563, Yokoseura, Cartas f. 133v, which is close to Fróis I, 278–9. Fróis had arrived in Japan to the port of Yokoseura in July 1563. On the Constantine theme, also McManus 2019: 131.

[89] Luís Fróis, 14 November 1563, Yokoseura, Cartas f. 133v.

[90] Fróis I, 282.

This then is the context for the famous anecdote about Dom Bartolomeu's skirmish with Marishi-ten, a multi-faceted goddess of battle. On the road to war, he passed a statue of Marishi-ten topped by an image of the cockerel. Bartolomeu ordered the temple to be destroyed and struck the cockerel saying, 'how many times have you betrayed me'.[91] It was while he was in the field with his brother that he sent instructions to begin the work of tearing down temples.[92] This embrace of iconoclasm surely helped precipitate the backlash that occurred some months later. The ensuing conflict was now, however, conceived in terms of a battle taking place in the heavens.[93]

In Arima, the empirical logic told against Christianity. Arima Yoshisada (Dom André) was not Christian for more than eight or nine months before he fell ill with cancer.[94] The local Buddhist monks took the opportunity to make it clear to his son that this was divine punishment from the gods and the Buddhas for becoming Christian.[95] His son Arima Harunobu was convinced by their arguments and persecuted Christians when he assumed power. When religious diplomacy in its bluntest form compelled a volte-face in 1580, the Jesuit narrative reveals the intense psychological pressure that resulted. Finally resolving to go to Kuchinotsu for baptism, he visited the baths and there suddenly fainted as if he had dropped dead. At once a rumour sprang up that this was the punishment of the gods and Buddhas, and such was the uproar that his resolve to convert disintegrated. With remarkable frankness, Fróis tells us that 'however a few days later the youth recognised the benefit that the Visitor had made to him in making the boat enter his port of Kuchinotsu' and so he finally submitted to the

[91] Luís Fróis, 14 November 1563, Yokoseura, Cartas f. 135; and 17 November 1563, Yokoseura, f. 127v.

[92] Fróis I, 283.

[93] Anon., Japan, 1564, Cartas, ff. 152–152v. On Sumitada's empiricist relation with the cross: Luís de Almeida, 25 October 1565, Fukuda, Cartas f. 160v. He may have continued in a pluralist manner, if he also took the tonsure (*shukke*) in Shingon Buddhism in 1574 (Higashibaba 2001: 39–40). The following year Deus was supplicated: Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, ff. 350–52v; compare Fróis II, 381–3, 394, and see Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 416v.

[94] Fróis I, 298–304; II 459–64; Afonso Gonçalves, 24 September 1576, Arima, Cartas, f. 371v.

[95] Fróis I, 463; Francisco Carrión, 10 December 1579, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, f. 434v; Valignano 1954: 275.

baptismal waters.[96] Since the death of his father, the script of divine punishment had clearly gripped his mind. He was risking death by walking towards baptism: No wonder his knees buckled.

Bungo and the Battle of the Gods

The conversion of Ōtomo Sōrin encompassed the domestic, intellectual and even visionary dimensions of his existence, all to be considered in due course. The following narrative, however, shows that shifting and conflicting interpretations of supernatural efficacy shaped every step of his journey towards Christianity and the arguments that raged about him in consequence.[97]

Under Sōrin, Bungo became a principal base for Christianity in the 1550s, and a missionary hospital, schools and residences flourished – but without any evident inclination towards Christian teaching on his part.[98] Around 1562 he became a Buddhist initiate, which is when he acquired the name Sōrin, and he was drawn into the sophistications of Zen Buddhism.[99] However his approach to religion for most of his adult life could best be described as exploratory and experimental. His war with the Mōri in the 1560s induced him to reach out for more than saltpetre and cannons: he also began to supplicate the Christian deity for victory, and he came to see the padres as a good luck charm.[100]

He remained notably flexible and pluralist, however. In 1570 he had invited a leading monk from Kyoto, Iun Sōetsu from the Zuihō-in subtemple of Daitoku-ji, to come to Bungo and instruct him in meditation. (The temple still holds his portrait, reproduced in Figure 3.1). He ordered the construction of the temple of Jurinji, which rose up in front of his fortress at Usuki.[101] Sōrin also noticed here a means of preventing his second son, Chikaie, from contesting the succession by

[96] Fróis III, 135–6.
[97] Compare Kanda 2014, consulted after this chapter was drafted but also emphasising the crucial role of 'worldly benefits' (*gensei-rieki*) in inducing the conversion of Sōrin (e.g., p. 82).
[98] Fróis III, 8. [99] Mayo 2015: 56.
[100] Giovanni Battista de Monte, 9 October 1564, Bungo, Cartas, f. 153v; Luís Fróis, 5 June 1577, Usuki, Cartas, f. 374; Belchior de Figueiredo, 11 October 1569, Bungo, Cartas, f. 279.
[101] *ZTHOS* 14, document 408, 237; Fróis II, 439; III, 9.

placing him as an acolyte at Jurinji.[102] Chikaie, however, refused to submit to the monastic life.[103] Much troubled, Sōrin then decided that the solution was to have him become Christian.[104] Chikaie was already drawn to the faith and consented readily to baptism and his new name Sebastião towards the end of 1575. This baptism – Sōrin's manoeuvre – was what finally forced a significant entry for Christianity among the noble warrior families of Bungo, rendering the faith potentially honourable.[105]

Conversions among retainers and servants at court began to cause serious divisions at the highest level, with opposition organised by Sōrin's wife (unfortunately known to us only by the Jesuit slur 'Jezebel') and her brother Tawara Chikakata. She felt the threat particularly acutely as a member of the Nata family, who supplied the high priests to the Usa Hachiman shrine.[106] This was also the point at which Sōrin began to retire, handing over the official oversight of government to his son Yoshimune (1558–1605), who found himself pulled between the powerful faction around his mother and the growing Christian movement.

The crucial context in which to explain the breakthrough elite conversions of 1575–1576 in Bungo is that of spirit possession and a healing crisis. In this atmosphere of demonic threat, the Jesuits' rites of exorcism were evidently attractive. Converts also seem to have been effecting a kind of exorcism through their iconoclastic acts, violently driving the old metapersons from their physical abodes, even if their anger was fearful to contemplate.[107] Tawara Chikakata's own teenaged, adopted son Chikatora was sucked into this psychodrama after

[102] Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 356, 356v; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 418v. Chikaie had been adopted by Tawara Chikakata.

[103] Fróis III, 9. [104] Fróis II, 440.

[105] Around this time, Sōrin's nephew and son-in-law Ichijō Kanesada of Tosa also converted: Fróis II, 440–1. Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, ff. 350–2v.

[106] Fróis IV, 341, 25. See Ward 2009: 119–25, 154–5 and Strathern 2020a. Earlier clues as to her ritual flexibility: Belchior de Figueiredo, 11 October 1569, Bungo, Cartas, f. 279; Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchintosu Cartas, f. 360v.

[107] Fróis I, 266, 381; II, 427; Belchior de Figueiredo, 11 October 1569, Bungo, Cartas, f. 278; Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 355v–63v; Luís Fróis, 30 September 1578, Usuki, Cartas ff. 405v–6. Ward 2009: 160–3.

having witnessed the dramatic exorcism of a woman. The demon inflicting her had testified to the efficacy of Christianity, laughing at the *yamabushi* who had failed to heal her, which caused the monk and others to convert. Eventually, in 1577, Chikatora followed suit.[108] Sōrin's wife and her brother Chikakata were livid.[109]

And then Sōrin himself fell ill. At this point he decisively turned against the anti-Christian faction, removing himself from his senior wife and taking up with the mother-in-law of his converted son Sebastião.[110] Soon afterwards he dispatched a message requesting the Japanese brother João de Torres to come and preach, and soon afterwards his new partner and her daughter were baptised as Julia and Cointa respectively.[111] What lay behind this? It seems that Julia too had been ill at the point of their cohabitation. Both Luís Fróis and Japanese chronicles depict a distraught 'Jezebel' as attempting to gain revenge by calling upon divine and magical assistance. According to the *Ōtomoki* chronicle, 'she gathered all the temple priests and *yamabushi* here and there to offer numerous prayers day and night without ceasing'; this was carried out in secret, but everyone was curious as to what was going on, and Sōrin was enraged as a result.[112] Kanda Chisato argues – persuasively, given the context described above – that Sōrin saw Julia's ill-health as the result of these ritual manoeuvres, and baptism as the solution.[113] In which case, when Julia recovered, Sōrin would have interpreted this as a final piece of evidence that the healing power of the Christian God was indeed superior to that of the local deities – and, given that his own health was vulnerable, a means of his own succour.

[108] Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 355v–63v; compare Fróis II, 484–5.

[109] Fróis, 16 October 1578, Cartas 1598, ff. 418v–20v; Fróis III, 14. Chikakata's disapproval of Chikatora's conversion to 'the sect of the Southern Barbarians' also seems to be evident (though the sense is unclear) in a letter he wrote on the ninth day of the ninth month (year unknown) in *ZTHOS* 23, document 491, pp. 235–6.

[110] Fróis III, 12–14; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas f. 418v.

[111] Fróis III, 16; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 419.

[112] *Ōtomoki*, 565; compare *Intoku taiheiki*, 272–3. On the source criticism issues here, see Strathern 2020a: 264.

[113] Kanda 2014: 87–91. Fróis's narrative (III, 14) seems to attempt to downplay the possibility that such pagan appeals could be effective – because he tells us that God saw to it that her curses rebounded, and that rather than Julia going blind she herself suffered in the eyes while her enemy convalesced.

This must represent the most significant turning point. Sōrin listened ever more seriously to Christian preaching, stopped visiting temples and abandoned his long discipline of meditation with the Zen monks. On 28 August 1578, he was baptised as Dom Francisco, taking the name of the first Jesuit to ever impress himself on his mind, Francis Xavier.[114] Yoshimune was evidently deeply impressed, and with his father's retirement the dilemmas of state religious policy were now his concern. Luís Fróis seems to have had particularly close access to Yoshimune during this part of 1578, and so it is worth listening to the insistent theme in his narrative of how the young lord began systematically to detach himself, privately and publicly, from the veneration of the kami and buddhas.[115] His rhetorical strategy focused repeatedly on the *uselessness* of the gods and their priestly supplicants, particularly the *yamabushi*.[116] He ruthlessly cast aside the customary acts of Ōtomo religious patronage.[117] A high point of the ritual year was the festival in Funai dedicated to Hachiman and traditionally attended by lords marching in procession with thousands of men. But this year when Yoshimune and Sōrin set out to Funai, apparently making for the festival, they pointedly turned into the church and spent the day there instead.

Around this time, Sōrin's daughter and her husband Kiyota Shigetada found themselves cast into a desperate healing crisis. Their much-loved two-year-old daughter fell ill, and for fifteen days the father engaged various ritual healers ('bonzes, sorcerers') who promised to cure her, encouraged by Sōrin's spurned wife. But to no avail. When his daughter died, Kiyota Shigetada determined to kill the ritualists who had deceived him. At this juncture, Sōrin intervened and suggested that he become Christian, and so he called for baptism.[118] Fróis has it that this led to orders for *yamabushi* and other

[114] Fróis III, 28, and Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas f. 422, confirm that it was on 'St. Augustine's day'. Francisco Cabral took the occasion to remind him of the blessings God had bestowed on him since the padres had been in his land. Fróis II, 22.

[115] Luís Fróis, 5 June 1577, Usuki, Cartas ff. 373v–86; Luís Fróis, October 1578, Usuki, Cartas ff. 428–30v; Fróis III, 26–37, 44–51.

[116] Fróis III, 26; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 425. Meanwhile, the miracles associated with Xavier became ever more fascinating: Fróis III, 29–31.

[117] Fróis III, 32–3; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas ff. 425r–v.

[118] Fróis III, 34–6; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, ff. 426v–7.

non-Christian ritualists to be executed; a Japanese chronicle confirms that such orders were made but notes that they were later adjusted to banishment.[119]

Yet underneath these staccato dramas of bodily health, the drumbeat of war was sounding ever more insistently. In exactly the same period that Sōrin was moving towards baptism, from the start of 1578 to the summer, Bungo was gearing up for battle. The Shimazu of Satsuma to the southeast had begun to expand and had moved against the Īto of Hyūga, whose daimyo fled to seek help from his relatives, the Ōtomo. Yoshimune decided on a bold response and in March pushed a large army into Hyūga. They met with victory, capturing Matsuo castle in May.[120] It was therefore when the Ōtomo were at the height of their military success that Sōrin was finally baptised.[121]

In early October, he was roused from his double retirement to lead an expedition to the territory of Tsuchimochi in Hyūga accompanied by a force of Christian samurai decked out with crosses and rosaries.[122] His aim, apparently, was to found a new society of Mushika (in present-day Nobeoka) governed by the laws and customs of Europe. Three retainers were sent to destroy all local temples and monasteries, clearing ground for the Jesuits to build on.[123] Only one, 'Gião', was a Christian, and intriguingly also a lay exorcist. He seems to have used the occasion to demonstrate that the local deities could not avenge their destroyed abodes, and the two other retainers sought baptism as a result.[124] This underlines the point that iconoclasm was not simply an expression of Christianity but also a means of making Christians.[125]

[119] Fróis III, 35; *Ōtomoki*, 565; *Intoku taiheiki*, 272–3. Strathern 2020a: 266 for source criticism.

[120] The campaigns are described in a letter of April 1578 from Yoshimune to Tamura Chikasada (*ZTHOS* 24, document 45, p. 27) and in the annals of Yoshimune and Sōrin (*ZTHOS* 24, documents 37 and 38, pp. 22–3).

[121] Although as late as June/July he was still hedging his bets and propitiating the Tenmangū Shrine for success in battle: *ZTHOS* 24, documents 75, 81.

[122] And he had asked about the holy wood of the true cross before baptism: Fróis III, 17, 23, 122.

[123] Fróis III, 31–2; 37–9; Rodrigues 2001: 100.

[124] Luís Fróis, 30 September 1578, Usuki, Cartas ff. 407–8.

[125] Around this same time, Yoshimune is reported as claiming that he was engaged in dismantling temples 'so that the lords of the land may come to understand by these means the little advantage that their idolatries brought them' – that is, showing that their promise of immanent power was a delusion: Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas ff. 415v–28.

Meanwhile, Yoshimune's attachment to the faith reached its high point, much to the consternation of some principal vassals.[126] In November, Yoshimune set out for Notsu and asked for a mass to be recited on the morning of his departure. He had not gone two leagues on the road when he received news of the greatest victory so far: Three fortresses in Hyūga had delivered themselves to Bungo without bloodshed. He wrote to the padres, attributing this wondrous success to the mass.[127]

The conflicts that now wracked the highest echelons of Bungo were at once a marital conflict, a factional struggle and a wrestling match between two gods of war, Deus and Hachiman. Deus had been in the ascendant, but perhaps 'Jezebel's' prayers were not so much in vain as the Jesuits wished. In December Tawara Chikakata had been ordered to encircle Taka castle but was himself caught in a pincer movement by Shimazu forces. The Bungo troops were routed and lost thousands of men and many of their leading commanders. The Battle of Mimigawa, as it became known, was a devastating defeat. Sōrin was forced to abandon Tsuchimochi and flee to the south of the Bungo. Lesser lords rose up in rebellion, and the remnant troops cast around for something to blame. The devil made hay in the sunshine of their defeat:

> So great was the hatred that was raised against us that it was almost indescribable, and if the Lord was not protecting us there is no doubt that we all ran a great risk of being killed . . . [they] began to put the blame for all the destruction on us, saying that it was because King Francisco had become Christian and abandoned the veneration of the cult of the kami and hotoke that Bungo had received so great a punishment.[128]

The anti-Christian party had predicted this outcome, and the very night news of the disaster arrived, Fróis had been reading to Yoshimune and his retinue from a treatise written to disprove the argument that where Christians went the punishment of the gods followed.[129] Fróis does not spare details of the humiliating backlash. Vassals and relatives, including a high-ranking monk in Kyoto, wrote

[126] Fróis III, 47.
[127] Fróis III, 57; Francisco Carrión, 10 December 1579, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, f. 439; Ward 2009: 170.
[128] Fróis III, 85 and 87, and again in 120, supported by Francisco Carrión, 10 December 1579, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 440v–1.
[129] Fróis III, 67. Luís Fróis, 20 February 1588, Arima, Cartas f. 201v.

to insist that the fortunes of the house be restored through an immediate change of religious policy.[130] While Sōrin's commitment was unshaken, Yoshimune stopped his dalliance with Christianity and yielded to the arguments of his mother's faction.[131] He sent a message to Fróis to announce that he could no longer be friendly with the padres; recent elite conversions melted into apostasies.

Fróis's account chimes with that of a Japanese letter written in 1580 by Tachibana Dōsetsu, one of Sōrin's most experienced and trusted vassals, to thirteen men who had been placed in charge of territories in southern Bungo.[132] Dōsetsu had not been present at Mimigawa but was writing in its aftermath about a range of issues including the best way to respond to the rebellions breaking out. In the first article of the letter, he attributes misfortune not only to the loss of two senior advisors but also to the agency of the gods:

> Since the death of Sōkan and Akihaya, your country [Bungo Province] has not been run according to principles, and *due to divine punishment*, in recent years, you have not been victorious in battle, and your reputation has been ruined everywhere. Eventually, this will cause trouble for you. Because of this, we are criticised in other provinces, and even young children who beat dogs for fun mock us. [italics added][133]

Apparently, a rebel in the north, Akizuki Tanezane, was making propaganda use of the behaviour of devotees of the 'Indian sect' who had thrown Buddha and kami images into the rivers or used them as firewood. 'These are conditions that have never been heard of in previous generations!' It was not the acceptance of Christianity per se that was the main concern here but the repudiation of traditional relations with the gods.

His correspondents, the southern retainers, agreed with him and then sent their own letter to Yoshimune's advisors, dilating on the theme of religious transgression amongst other matters.[134] Yoshimune is castigated for his misrule; he is advised to break filial

[130] Fróis III, 87, 98–109, [131] Fróis III, 90.

[132] *Tachibana-ke monjo*, 16 February 1580. *ZTHOS* 24, document 406, pp. 214–15. The translations given here are by Xia-Kang Ziyi but draw on Chris Mayo's (2015: 13–15) helpful translation. See also Kanda 2014: 97–8; Elisonas 1991: 341.

[133] The growing disloyalty of vassals is also evident in Lourenço Mexia, 20 October 1580, Bungo, Cartas, ff. 458v–77v.

[134] *ZTHOS* 24, document 408.

piety rather than side with his father's descent into the sect of the Southern Barbarians. The southern retainers' plea for the restoration of traditional public veneration seems framed against a Christian polemic of empiricism: 'Although deities are invisible and do not move, people worship them … Moreover, if (the retired lord) thinks Buddha and *kami* are unnecessary, Deus is just similarly invisible and should not be necessary, either.'[135]

More than forty years after Mimigawa, its lesson still resounded clearly enough to appeal to Fabian Fukansai in composing his anti-Christian work *Ha Daiusu* of 1620. It was a prime exhibit in his case that the followers of Deus 'who mock at gods and buddhas need not wait for the future; even in the present life they cannot escape the retribution of the gods and buddhas which they deserve'.[136] There is no space here to relate in detail further twists and turns in the fate of the Ōtomo after this.[137] But that the religious rivalry was primarily contested on empirical grounds in Kyushu should now be abundantly clear.

Reshaping Warrior Authority

The conditions of the *sengoku* period not only intensified the imperatives of religious diplomacy and divine assistance, they also ensured that daimyo were pitched into a contest for the *social power* that religious institutions and visions generated. In this way the third mode of the model of ruler conversion became salient. More than this: The struggles of the civil war period served to undermine the interdependence of political authority and sangha (*ōbō-buppō*).[138] In contention was not just who wielded power but what the legitimate exercise of it entailed. This was because religious institutions had been sucked into the power vacuum to become significant concentrations of temporal

[135] *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, p. 238.

[136] Hibbard and Hiraishi, trans. 1963: 6–7. Further examples follow. Ironically, this merely swivels round the rhetoric he used as a Christian much earlier: Baskind and Bowring 2015: 190.

[137] See Elisonas 1991: 342–7; Ward 2009: 174–7; *ZTHOS* 25, documents 275, 286. Yoshimune was finally baptised in April of 1587 – as Constantino, no less – during an invasion by the Shimazu, under the influence of the lord of Buzen, Kodera Kanbei, or Kuroda Simão. Merely three months later he apostatised under the pressure of Hideyoshi's edict expelling the padres. Fróis IV: 341–2, and see Luís Fróis, 22 February 1588, Cartas II, f. 196–7v.

[138] See above p. [ ] on *ōbō-buppō*.

authority in their own right. Shrines and temple complexes – especially the long-standing and well-endowed Tendai and Shingon temples – controlled vast tracts of productive land and many lucrative commercial centres. Head temples could control networks of hundreds of branch temples, they enjoyed effective extra-territoriality as legal sanctuaries, and, above all, they developed their own bodies of troops.[139]

A certain dynamic of transcendentalisation also played its part in the fragmentation of the religio-political field: The lay salvationism unleashed by Kamakura Buddhism conceded social power to new and radical organisational forms. Galen Amstutz has observed the ways in which this involved a disavowal of the 'animism-monism' (aka immanentism) of Japanese Buddhism. This allows a certain comparison to be drawn with Protestantism, as do other attributes including the role of book and pamphlet circulation, the shift from monastic to lay salvation, a certain distancing from the kami and a clear association with the commercial development of early modernity.[140] These movements were also a response to disorder, and as such they created new forms of Durkheimian solidarity at one level, while frustrating them at another. Leagues or confederations *(ikki)* of villagers formed roughly egalitarian organisations, which were particularly formidable when galvanised by the teaching of Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land) Buddhism. Under the auspices of Ishiyama Honganji, ordinary devotees set themselves up as autonomous towns and villages and could form vertical structures led by daimyo as well.[141] This was a political force with an integrated religious rationale that the daimyo themselves otherwise lacked. Indeed, it was a most direct ideological challenge to them, for the *Ikkō ikki* claimed to be servants of the emperor whom the arriviste daimyo had side-lined. They had only one other authority they recognised, the Honganji high priest, who became at once the true ruler of the country and the absolute arbiter of sacred truth. The movement allowed, in other words, for the

[139] *Ōtomo-shi toshiyori rensho shojō an* [copy of a letter with co-signatures of the senior councillors of the Ōtomo clan], document 418, in *Ōita-ken shiryō*, vol. 24. Discussion in Kanda 2014: 77.

[140] Amstutz 2012: 159–61. Cautious comparison, because Amstutz (and see 1998) is alert to many points of contrast and problems with the historiographical legacy of such analogies, which go back to the Jesuits themselves: see x, fn. 35. Meanwhile Buc 2019 compares Jōdo Shinshū and Anabapatists. Tsang 2010: 94–5, on the theology of grace.

[141] Ooms 1985: 22, 31.

emergence of a kind of Buddhist divinised–righteous kingship from below.[142] Disbelievers were to be expelled and denied rebirth in the Pure Land. Such exclusivist discourses were most powerful inculcators of loyalty.

The Hokke branch of Nichiren Buddhism, which found particular appeal among townspeople, was even more uncompromising in certain ways – in its exclusivism, for example, and its insistence that secular rule was intrinsically illegitimate. It too was driven by a fervent salvationism and a desire to create a truly Buddhist domain.[143] In a profoundly transcendentalist move, worldly calamities could be placed at the door of false soteriologies while the persecution of the faithful only confirmed the truth of their path, leading to a notion of martyrdom that presents an uncanny anticipation of Christianity (and would constitute a very powerful form of conceptual control).[144]

The result was that, just as in Europe of this time, competing varieties of reformist transcendentalisms played a role in the military–political struggles of the period.[145] More simply, the religious field was strikingly 'unconsolidated', and daimyo would inevitably seek to render it coherent and controllable. Any would-be unifier would have to confront the political–military capabilities of shrines, temples and leagues, and sequester their economic resources. The *Ikkō ikki* , Hokkeshū and the Christians all demonstrated to the daimyo that if they would not harness the social power of religion to their own purposes then other elements in society – commoners, monks, prophets – would seize hold of them instead.[146] The traditional orchestration of interests between the religious and political poles of authority had broken down. The institution that had anciently brought the two poles together – the emperorship – had sunk beneath the level of political relevance.[147] It would be a pressing task for the Tokugawa shoguns to fashion a new alignment.

[142] Ooms 1985: 32. Note Tsang 2010: 239–40 on millenarian readings.
[143] Ooms 1985: 37. [144] Stone 2014: 154–5.
[145] Naturally, comparison with the wars of religion in Europe is inapposite in several other ways. For careful Japanese–European comparisons, see Buc 2019; 2020.
[146] An argument formed by Asao Naohiro and developed by Ooms 1985: 33. See also Kawamura 2009: 157.
[147] Compare Paramore 2017: 7. The Ashikaga Shoguns had also attempted to unite the two poles in certain ways.

But the first steps were taken, as ever, by Oda Nobunaga.[148] Nobunaga's attempt to subjugate *buppō* (Buddhist order) to the state has been described as the first act in the 'redefinition of the "place" of Buddhism in Japanese society', and as breaking for the first time 'the taboo against a radical rejection of Buddhist institutions in Japan'.[149] When he was overseeing the building of his castles at Nijō (1569) and Azuchi (1576), he deliberately ordered that Buddhist statues and architecture be cut up and used as mere masonry for his own projects, thus flaunting a symbolism of the subjection of Buddhism to the construction of the state.[150] The most resonant act in this vein was the massacre of monks at the Tendai complex of Enryakuji on Mount Hiei in September 1571 in retaliation for their assistance of enemy daimyo. Thousands of monks and laity perished in a week-long orgy of violence.[151] Amidst the outrage, a substantial backlash responded to the rallying cry of Kennyo (1543–1592), the abbot of Ishiyama Honganji. The *Ikkō ikki* then proved the most obstreperous obstacle to Nobunaga's will-to-power, and his decade-long campaign (1570–1580) against them culminated in their fortress-temple complex being burned to the ground.

All this created an opening for new religious and philosophical visions to take root. In the end, especially under the Tokugawa, new forms of Confucianism took the most advantage. But whereas Confucianism could engage and contest Buddhism without seeking to wipe it out, Christianity's exclusivism was both attraction and threat. This is the paradox: Exclusivist principles of social organisation maintain unity when they achieve dominance within a single domain but otherwise produce conflict; sixteenth-century Japan shows this no less than the wars of religion in sixteenth-century Europe. Thus Christianity, which many elites considered a distressing source of chaos and disloyalty, could equally have appeared to converted lords as a potential source of public order and personal authority – if only it was thoroughly dominant in their domains.

[148] Lieberman 2009: 444–5; McMullin 1984: 4–5.
[149] McMullin 1984: 5, 257; Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 64 for second quote. See Bowring 2005: 429.
[150] McMullin 1984: 86.
[151] Luís Fróis, 4 October 1571, Miyako, Cartas, ff. 332r–v.

Warrior Iconoclasm and Social Discipline

Blessed be the Lord under whose powerful hand the hearts of kings and monarchs may be humbled.[152]

In this light, the iconoclastic actions undertaken by converted daimyo take on a new aspect.[153] Undoubtedly, at times, Jesuits urged the imperative of destroying pagan sites and symbols on their spiritual wards – much more than they were later willing to admit.[154] There was, too, an element of popular participation and psychology at work connected to the dramas of exorcism and metaperson-repudiation.[155] Yet, the broader context of clashes between warrior and Buddhist power described above suggests that some rather banausic interests were also at work.

For example, we know that the Ōtomo expansion in the 1560s had brought under their control one of the most important religious centres in Japan, the Usa Hachiman shrine in Buzen. It lay at the head of an extensive network of shrines, with a fort and a troop of soldiers (*shinpei* – gods' army), and was an enthusiastic participant in the expanding maritime economy of Kyushu, being involved in ship-building, banking and silver flows.[156] No wonder that Sōrin sought to exert some control over it.[157] The Nata family, who provided high priests to the shrine, had also provided Sōrin's senior wife ('Jezebel'), referred to above. But tensions with the shrine remained so acute that the Ōtomo attacked the shrine in 1561 and 1576.[158] When they burned down its buildings again in 1581, then, it is less evidently simply a consequence of Sōrin's baptism.

In particular, Yoshimune's hostility to Buddhist and Shintō shrines, temples and mendicants in 1578, which Fróis was so keen to see as budding Christian piety, seems again part of this larger

[152] Aires Sanches, 8 September 1576, Hirado, Cartas, f. 372v.
[153] Considered more fully in Strathern 2020b.
[154] Ōmura: Luís Fróis, 14 November 1563, Yokoseura, Cartas, ff. 134–134v, Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, ff. 350–2v; Luís de Almeida, 31 January 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 370–1; Fróis II, 424, 430. Arima: Fróis III, 148; Higashibaba 2001: 92; Ross 1994: 53; Tronu 2012: 58–62.
[155] Fróis II, 424–5; III, 118; IV 503; Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, ff. 355v–63v, 250v.
[156] Petrucci 2017: 117–18. [157] Ward 2009: 123–4.
[158] *Ōita-ken shiryō*, vol. 24, documents 417, 418; Ward 2009: 124.

pattern.[159] In 1576 he had already shown an inclination to cut religious specialists down to size by pitching them against Jesuits in debate – predating Nobunaga's use of debate at Azuchi castle to subdue the Hokke sect in 1579.[160] The European evidence leaks clues here and there that Yoshimune eyed the temples and monasteries as hoards of both wealth and manpower, which he and his retainers could sorely use.[161] The year 1578 saw him diverting their revenue to his own vassals, particularly youths of his own generation, who were given licence to dispossess monks and monasteries for the smallest misdemeanour.[162] The monks were cast onto the street and freed up for military service. The fact that in 1582, well after he had abandoned any favour to Christianity, Yoshimune was still apportioning lands that had belonged to temples to his retainers is telling.[163] Fróis himself noticed the more panoramic perspective to be adopted on these events, for he implicitly compares Yoshimune's actions to those of Oda Nobunaga.

The daimyo of the warring states period sought to reach further into the lives of their subjects than any rulers had done before – but in an atmosphere in which the loyalty of their subjects had never been more precarious.[164] European visitors remarked with some fascination on the intensity of the ideal liege–vassal relationship that resulted.[165] As ever, religion provided supramundane enforcers of oaths.[166] But just as warriors ignored the threat of divine anger in damaging temples, so all too many ignored it when breaking oaths. Some daimyo turned to the Jōdo Shinshū movement as a new means of creating solidarity and loyalty.

Valignano certainly diagnosed a crisis of loyalty and naturally prescribed Christianity as the cure.[167] Indeed, Philippe Buc has suggested

[159] Fróis has him claim that if he took revenues away from the monks and dismantled their temples then his noble vassals would perceive how little they owed to the assistance of native gods. Fróis III, 31; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 424v.

[160] Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, f. 357v.

[161] Francisco Carrión, 10 December 1579, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, f. 439v; Fróis IV, 155. Compare Miguel Vaz, 3 September 1576, Arima, Cartas, f. 371v.

[162] Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 424v.

[163] *ZTHOS* 26, document 98.

[164] Ooms 1984: 18–19.

[165] Elisonas 1981a: 56–7. Ikegami 1995: 40 refers to 'the severe tensions between honorific loyalty and honorific individuality' built into the warrior culture.

[166] *UP* 115. Mayo 2015: 45.

[167] Valignano 1944: 139.

that 'the sacral nature of fidelity' in Europe lent it a different valance in Europe than in Japan.[168] Certainly, since at least the 1560s, Jesuits could attribute the civil wars of Japan to the absence of fear of God.[169] Elisonas argued that the Christian ethic of selfless obedience as exemplified in the Jesuits themselves must have exerted some traction on the samurai mentality, as Valignano hoped.[170] Fróis even argued with Yoshimune that one of the Jesuits' main objectives in coming to Japan was to create peace and filial piety among their subjects.[171] If this slotted into a deeply embedded Confucian discourse, Christianity was distinctive insofar as it modelled a relationship with a personal god, an idealised father figure who peered inside the heart and deserved unquestioning love. Here was a perfect lord–vassal relationship and an intimidating big brother to maintain the integrity of oaths.[172] It was no doubt in order to protect this vision of hierarchical utility that the Jesuits presented themselves as emissaries from a Christendom unified in faith. Just how remote from reality this picture was only became apparent when Protestant nations appeared in Japanese waters.[173]

Two minor incidents illustrated the particular social power of Christianity during the breakthrough in Bungo of 1576. The first was Sōrin's perception that inducing the conversion of his second son Chikaie (Sebastião) and placing him under the care of the Jesuits would render him obedient. For Cabral, 'There was no other remedy to break the strong nature of the boy.'[174] The second was that of a servant, Estevão, who refused to carry out errands that involved dealing with non-Christian sacred images and objects. He stood his ground to the point of risking execution – a striking foreshadowing of the

[168] Buc 2020: 16.
[169] Giovanni Battista de Monte, 11 October 1564, Bungo. Cartas, f. 152v.
[170] Elisonas 1973: 43–7; 1981a: 82; and see Paramore 2015.
[171] Luís Fróis, 5 June 1577, Usuki, Cartas, f. 378v; Luís Fróis, October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 429.
[172] Fróis II, 58–9, has Takayama Zusho (Dom Dario) urge a vassal that one cannot trust anyone who does not know or fear God. The functional equivalence of the Christian God and *Tentō* is indicated by an oath by Ōmura Sumitada 1576, on pain of the punishment by 'the grace of the Heavenly Way'. See Higashibaba 2001: 39. Critics countered that Christianity was not a convincing guarantor of loyalty oaths (*Myōtei Dialogues*, Baskind and Bowring 2015: 187).
[173] Costa 2003: 46.
[174] Fróis II, 440; Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 356–356v.

martyrdoms that followed in later decades.[175] The Jesuits were forced to explain that Christians could not ultimately disobey the higher dictates of God. Sōrin's wife and many prominent vassals drew the conclusion that would later be arrived at by the unifiers of Japan – that converts were induced to subvert principles of filial and feudal piety and place their devotion to a meta-lord above that to their worldly lord. But another response was possible and perhaps it was Sōrin's: to marvel at how the will of converts could be bent into astonishing new forms of uprightness and fortitude.

Perhaps this apparent dimension of Christianity did indeed enhance its allure. However, when we consider the cases of Ōmura and Arima we find that it was, somewhat perversely, more often the experience of rebellion from non-Christian subjects that really impressed the value of Christian loyalty on them. In other words, in the short term, Christianity surely *intensified* crises of legitimacy and loyalty – to which it could then appear as a radical solution.[176] This process was a further driver of iconoclasm. Once a daimyo had indicated his opposition to Buddhism, the various networks of shrines and monasteries in his domain must have appeared as a potential seedbed of sedition – particularly given that some temples had armed troops of their own.[177] Ōmura Sumitada's (Dom Bartolomeu) iconoclastic sweep beginning in November 1574 was partly the result of a rebellion earlier that year in which Buddhist monks had been involved.[178] It was akin to draining a swamp.

When Sōrin set out to create his Christian community of Mushika (in Hyūga) he also sought to sweep it clear of Buddhist and Shintō structures as noted above – but his vision was more grandly framed.[179]

[175] Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 358v–60.

[176] See Fróis II, 424 on Dom Bartolomeu; III, 139 on Arima; IV, 157, 499–500 for Shiga Chikatsugu (Dom Paulo) in Amakusa, with often explicit reflections on Christian loyalty.

[177] João Francisco, 14 September 1575, Ōmura, Cartas, f. 354v

[178] Francisco Cabral (12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, ff. 350–52v, pp. 351–2) explained that previously he had not moved too hard against the idols and monks because it would inspire a rebellion, but now that the latter had already rebelled and their enmity was established, it made sense to push ahead.

[179] He also noted how strong Buddhist institutions were in the area: Fróis II, 40; Luís Fróis, 30 September 1578, Usuki, Cartas ff. 406v–8.

Fróis notes that even before his interest in Christianity, 'he was greatly curious for knowledge, there was no man in all Japan that more particularly made enquiries of the secular and ecclesiastic estates of Europe and of India than this king'.[180] This was not idle conversation, clearly, for the Mushika community was to be established upon the laws and customs of Europe.[181] Sōrin must have pondered the implications of baptism for years before finally receiving it, and he had clearly concluded that one could not merely graft Christianity onto the old structures of life that had dogged his rule in Bungo. The utopianism of this project suggests a sense that existing traditions had failed to resolve conflict. New solutions – as to how ruler and people could learn 'to live in love and a fraternal union' – from faraway lands were worth trying.[182]

Christian daimyo were not, in fact, in a position to immediately homogenise their realms. But the domains of Christian daimyo were unique in how quickly the populace were pressured to convert through iconoclasm and threat, or induced through a sense of filial obligation, subordinate calculation and elite imitation.[183] Christianity therefore may have exerted a certain appeal to some of the visionary-minded. But it was a risky, even quixotic route to take towards stability: From the early 1560s, critics of Christianity could point to the way that wars and destruction followed the padres around like a trail of blood.[184]

[180] Fróis III, 8. Closer to baptism he would speak freely on 'the good government of the Christian republic' (17). See Schwade 1993.

[181] Fróis III, 38.

[182] Fróis III, 19. According to Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas f. 420, he wanted everyone in Hyūga to be Christian 'so they would all serve him the better'. After the defeat at Mimigawa forced the abandonment of Mushika, he attempted a much smaller-scale Christian experiment in Tsukimi, but it was recognised that there could be no larger attempt to unite his vassals under the new faith. Fróis IV: 16–17; Kanda 2014: 94–6, 105. Bungo then became a territory in which various Buddhist sects, Shintō institutions and Christians were largely tolerated, even if the relationship was uneasy and unpredictable. Thanks to Christopher M. Mayo for discussion.

[183] On how elite conversions led to converts by friends, allies, relatives, lesser vassals, subjects, see, in Kyoto (Miyako): Fróis I, 254–5, 266, 268; in Arima Fróis I, 303–4; II, 454; in Ōmura, João Francisco, 14 September 1575, Cartas, f. 353v, 355v; in Amakusa, Fróis V, 165–7. See also Ribeiro 2006.

[184] Juan Fernández, 9 October 1564, Hirado, Cartas, f. 144v; Luís Fróis, 1 June 1569, Miyako, Cartas, f. 263v.

Sacred Rule

The sixteenth century was an age in which coercive power, naked, was unashamed to show itself or speak for itself. Authority had disintegrated in the face of military might that felt no need to hide behind a screen of legitimacy.[185]

This was how Herman Ooms in his classic work on *Tokugawa Ideology* described the status of the *sengoku* daimyo, immersed in the immediate challenges of a period in which 'defeat by rivals and defection by vassals' could come at any time.[186] To what extent may we concur that daimyo authority represents a form of pre-legitimised power?

As for any other laymen, daimyo patronage of temples and shrines was a means of displaying wealth and generating prestige.[187] For great families like the Ōtomo, these relations were long-standing, wide-ranging and public: hence the shock when Yoshimune and Sōrin sought to cast them aside.[188] One such group they repudiated, for example, were *yamabushi* from the Rokugōsan Gongen temple who had come each year to collect alms in return for bestowing the life-giving benediction of their deity.[189] Moreover, ambitious daimyo clearly saw their association with particular deities and shrines as vital to their status and power.[190] Correspondence from Ōtomo retainers indicates that the public acting out of human–metaperson relations was understood as an integral element of maintaining hierarchical order.[191] This was directly linked to the peace and success of the whole realm – in immanentist fashion. But there was a strong transcendentalist dimension too, for these relations were framed within a deeply ethicised discourse combining Buddhist and Confucian or Way of Heaven principles. Hence, in supplicating the Usa Hachiman shrine in the 1560s, the Mōri are presented as enemies of both Bungo and Hachiman, who 'despised the Three Jewels [Buddha, the

[185] Ooms 1985: 20. [186] Ooms 1985: 18–19. See also Souyri 2001: 206.
[187] Vesey 2004.
[188] Fróis III, 33; Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, ff. 425r–v. Ward 2009: 145–8 for some of these relationships.
[189] Fróis III, 333. [190] Conlan 2016; Thal 2005: 50–1.
[191] *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, p. 238.

Dhamma, Sangha]', 'distorted right and wrong' in the country, and wished to violate the Way of Heaven (*Tentō*), while the Ōtomo, observed the Five Precepts and were committed to protecting the Buddhist law and the imperial law (*ōbō-buppō*).[192] It is no surprise then to find this same discourse deployed by critics of Sōrin and Yoshimune's Christian turn. For the southern retainers of Bungo in circa 1580, when Sōrin turned his back on Zen Buddhism, 'it was a disgrace for the Buddhist belief. People all criticised the retired lord for being obstinate and close-minded'. The five Confucian virtues were the right way of man.[193]

One reason why Sōrin's baptism came so late in his life – and was only attempted after he had retired from active governance – was his awareness that the attempt to Christianise his realm would generate just this sort of outrage.[194] That is to say, his retreat with Julia may be interpreted as an attempted abdication from the legitimacy dilemmas of conversion. Indeed, as the next chapter will show, all daimyo conversions seem to have precipitated resistance and reaction. It is true that the 'relatively total power' daimyo wielded over their subjects was such that they were able to induce remarkable top-down waves of conversion following their own baptisms.[195] But they were not immune from the threat of 'opinion'. The support of their samurai and key vassals was vital to their ability to govern, as Kanda Chisato has recently pointed out.[196]

Warlord authority was therefore already beginning to draw upon both immanentist and transcendentalist forms of religious tradition.[197] The relative novelty of their position and their sheer numbers meant that they could not remotely approach the emperorship in terms of

[192] Bekki Akitsura and others, 1562, *ZTHOS* 21, document 223; compare Tawara Chikakata, 1562: *Ōita-ken shiryō*, vol. 24, document 430.

[193] The Southern Retainers, *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, pp. 237–8. For a proper lord would 'nurture great benevolence, do good deeds in order to continue the regime (for future generations), revere the Three Jewels of Buddhism, construct temples and pagodas' (235).

[194] Fróis III, 20, might hint at this.

[195] Paramore 2015: 406. Fróis III, 39, for the power of daimyo example among vassals.

[196] Kanda 2014: 71–7; 2010: 53–4.

[197] The template for posthumous daimyo deification was already forming in 1486, when Yoshida Kanetomo, the founder of Yoshida Shintō, proclaimed that Ōuchi Norihiro was the Great August Deity of Tsukiyama: Conlan 2016.

ritual elaboration.[198] The roles of the Kyushu daimyo were probably less deeply sacralised than those of the other principal cases considered in this book. If it is misleading to describe them as ideologically naked, they seem to have felt increasingly under-dressed, and, to a few, Christianity may have provided an attractive outfit. Catholic tradition contained some strong elements of righteousness and a more generic imagery of sanctification as conveyed through representations of Philip II, for example.[199] Christian Daimyo could become close to God – this deity who ordained the flourishing of a global Catholic empire – and describe themselves as the instruments of his will. In a text composed for the use of Jesuit seminarians in Japan, Valignano argued that even though Christianity might offer certain constraints on the power of rulers, 'there is nothing there that can detract from the veneration of kings'.[200]

But this has the flavour of a rear-guard action. Most daimyo, and most tellingly the unifiers, chose other apparel. Nobunaga's need for a radically new form of legitimacy was particularly intense: Low-born, acting without reference to emperor or shogun, and in open conflict with Buddhism, he had cast aside both *ōbō* and *buppō*. His approach displays echoes of other Asian empire-builders in his attempt to transcend all the rivalrous religious groups under his authority. The claims of priests and monastics to provide the basis of order were now tarnished, and another more basic principle demanded acknowledgement: the manifest good of the realm. As the only agency truly capable of securing that end, the state thus moved itself firmly into the centre-ground of public morality. This would be something cultivated under the Tokugawa shoguns with the assistance of Confucianism, but it is clearly presaged in Nobunaga's reification of *tenka*, the realm, which he used to defend his crushing of recalcitrant leagues, temples and enemies.[201]

Azuchi castle gave shape to this ideological vision. He devised plans for the construction of this seven-story fortress in 1576, shortly after his victory over the Echizen *Ikkō ikki*. In an unprecedented move, it

[198] Compare how the fourteenth-century Ashikaga Shoguns felt the need to acquire aspects of Buddhist sacred kingship: Conlan 2003: 191–2.

[199] Vlam 1977: 236.

[200] This again meant dwelling on the absence of loyalty in 'tumultuous Japan'. Massarella 2020: 161. *On the Mission of the Japanese Ambassadors to the Roman Curia* (published 1590) was initially drafted by Valignano and then translated into Latin and arranged into Colloquia by Duarte de Sande.

[201] Ōta 2011: 40; Totman 1993: 41; Ooms 1985: 26–7, 33–4.

was to be made entirely out of stone. Fróis reports that Buddhist statues ('idols') were pulled down and deployed for its construction.[202] The various floors mingled Buddhist, Confucian and Shintō motifs, but at the top was a square room whose theme was the notion of the Mandate of Heaven, explicitly referencing its Chinese origin.[203] In the last year of his life, Nobunaga constructed at Azuchi the Buddhist temple of Soken-ji, or 'All-seeing temple'. The Jesuits claimed that this was the centre of a project of self-divinisation; images of deities were assembled and positioned so as to venerate Nobunaga himself.[204] He would now become the source of salvation in this world, the being one prayed to for riches and miracle cures. Scholarship is split on how credible this claim is. Sceptics point out the lack of Japanese evidence and of any precedent in Japanese culture for the pursuit of divine honours in one's own lifetime.[205] Others follow Asao Naohiro in alluding to the contextual logic, and the clues that suggest a move towards self-divinisation provided at least the kernel for Fróis's report.[206] To be sure, after Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and then his successor Tokugawa Ieyasu both set in motion posthumous cults to themselves, and some lesser daimyos were also deified upon death.[207] It is when we adopt a comparative perspective that the claims about Nobunaga acquire most plausibility. For projections of self-divinisation tend to emerge, somewhat regardless of precedent, when extraordinary military feats generate unusual charisma and when the need to subdue the power of institutionalised religion grows acute.[208] There is a potential analogy here with Nobunaga's all-

[202] Luís Fróis 1 June 1569, Miyako, Cartas, f. 258.
[203] Ooms 1985: 35–6; Totman 1993: 83; Naitō 1976.
[204] Luís Fróis, 5 November 1582, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, vol II, ff. 62–2v; Fróis III, ch. 40.
[205] For sceptical views: Elisonas 1981a: 74; Lamers 2000; Boot 2000: 145–9. The argument by precedent needs to be set against the extent of innovation in this period and Nobunaga's transgressive inclinations and evident megalomania. As for the silence of the Japanese sources, it is possible this reflects the determination of later unifiers to insist on the priority of their own (posthumous) cults of divinity. (Ooms 1985: 107 on this historiographic climate.)
[206] Asao 1974; Ooms 1985: 34–9, 178; 1984: 4; Kawamura 2009: 157; McMullin 1984: 88 (who also cites Fuijiki Hisashi and Kashiwahara Kami); Sonehara 2008: 17–18; Akai 1991; Watsky 2004: 60; Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 157; Gordon 2009: 15. Conlan 2016: 91 is neutral.
[207] See pp. 153–7 below. [208] See *UP* 166–9, 214–5.

conquering contemporary, the Mughal emperor Akbar, who also looked to assert himself over rivalrous religious factions – and, indeed, also used public debate between them as a means of doing so.[209] The imagery of divinisation would certainly have been an apt way for Nobunaga to articulate his position as the only fixed point of order, an instantiation of the realm itself, equated with the all-seeing sky.

Christianity had arrived at a point when certain long-standing aspects of the relationship between religion and state had broken down, and daimyo were casting around for ways to articulate and enhance their moral and political authority. This plasticity created an opening for Christianity. It ensured that all three modes of ruler conversion could acquire relevance in Japan. And yet there were many other ways in which diplomatic advantage, supernatural efficacy and the social power of religion could be harnessed. The majority of daimyo had no need for the wares of the missionaries, and as the plastic *sengoku* era yielded to the iron Tokugawa regime, Christianity found itself reprehended.

[209] Moin 2012 on Akbar. Compare Nobunaga's debate between Pure Land and Hokke adherents in 1579.

4 *The Defeat of Christianity in Japan, 1560–1614*

The forces identified in Chapter 3 that compelled daimyo to convert to Christianity may be found in any society – regardless of the nature of its religion. Rulers everywhere may be drawn towards religious diplomacy, immanent power, and the prospect of state reconstruction. What difference did it make, therefore, to the fortunes of Christianity in Japan, that other transcendentalist traditions were already long-established there? The answer may be found by considering the nature of the intellectual encounter that Christians precipitated, the concrete opposition mounted by the sangha, and the explicit rejection of the faith articulated by the warrior elites who unified the land in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

The Intellectual Encounter: Open and Tough

Common Ground?

In Kongo, we saw that a broader cultural appeal ('glamour') provided part of the context for the importation of Christianity. Did anything similar happen in Japan? Let us merely note a summary point. Missionaries certainly sought to play on this theme, associating themselves with new technologies, art-works, learning and glorious royal courts.[1] But European culture never remotely challenged the status of the aesthetic traditions and decorum associated with the imperial court or with China.[2] Instead, the Jesuits came to realise that they suffered from a certain *deficit* of civility in local terms, and the policy of accommodation was something urged on them by their elite Japanese

[1] For an evocation of the grandeur of Europe with Christian kings more powerful than any in Japan, see Luís Fróis, 5 June 1577, Usuki, Cartas, ff. 377v, 378v; on technology and art as diplomacy/propaganda: Screech 2020; Levenson and Raby 2011; Vlam 1977; Boxer 1951: 184.

[2] Butler 2002; Boxer 1951: 45; Goble 2007: 54.

converts before the arrival of Valignano. Fróis reports an important convert from the 1560s referring to the 'foreign Padre whose language, dress, tradition, and customs were so ridiculous in our eyes that when we saw him in those first beginnings he served us to no other purpose but to give us occasion to laugh at him'.[3] Such apprehensions set the Jesuits on their long journey to acquiring Japanese forms of civilised appearance and behaviour.[4] It is true that the reception of Portuguese culture is more complex and strange than this suggests, for, first under Nobunaga and Hideyoshi and then into the early years of the seventeenth century, there developed a certain craze for 'Nanban' (southern barbarian) style. Lords and samurais experimented with various elements of Portuguese clothing and presentation – a 'sort of sartorial Lusimania'.[5] But this was a playful engagement with the exotic on thoroughly Japanese terms rather than any acknowledgement of a more generic superiority of European culture.

The developing Jesuit strategy of accommodation also produced the most profound attempts by early modern Europeans to engage with non-Christian religions in intellectual terms. The following discussion does not proceed far into this world of scholarship but rather focuses on what we can glean about the intellectual encounter as a driver of early daimyo conversions. Certainly, the Jesuits immediately recognised that they had arrived in a society in which the authority of formal debate and philosophical speculation was well established. Its long absorption of 'Axial' traditions of rationalised textual knowledge and transcendentalist systems in particular ensured as much. Naturally, all sides developed an appreciation of how differently configured those systems were.[6] But they also found interlocutors who already appreciated logical wrangling as a means of arbitrating between competing claims to ultimate truth, entertained conceptions of salvation as the highest end of human existence, conceived of heaven and hells,

[3] Sanga Hōki no Kami Yoriteru, baptised as Sancho in 1564, Elisonas 1973: 31.

[4] Boxer 1951: 157–8, 210–15, 227; Fromont 2014: 17. Valignano's Japanese embassy to Europe in the 1580s was designed to counteract this deficit: Massarella 2005.

[5] Toby 2019: 115, 129–34. Moreover, 'Nanban furyū became a fixture of both fashion and festival for about forty years.' Curvelo 2012; Elisonas 1973: 109–10.

[6] Many of the most important differences were highlighted in Francis Xavier's instructions: Elisonas 1973: 36. See Zampol D'Ortia et al. 2021 and Girard 2021 for a more refined sense of differences and miscommunications.

identified abstract universal ethical principles and touted the epistemological authority of ancient texts and their commentaries.[7]

Such commonalities – as well as their westward origin in 'India' – helped promote the initial and lingering assumption that the missionaries were in fact espousing a form of Buddhism.[8] Many of the points debated between Buddhists and Christians were also debated *within* each of these broad traditions – and centred on imponderable paradoxes set up by transcendentalism in any of its varieties. Thus, Pure Land soteriology could be compared to Lutheranism.[9] What is the relationship between form and substance or between the self and the body? What survives of the person when crossing the salvific barrier? What is the place of the religious virtuoso versus the layman, and what the role of the transfer of merit?[10] In some ways, at least, the same point applies to Confucianism.[11] Kiri Paramore has shown how certain battle-lines – to do with the wellsprings of ethical action and its relationship with hierarchy, for example – cut across Buddhist, Confucian and Catholic traditions.[12] No wonder Luís Fróis evokes a scenario in which the similar commingled disturbingly with the alien:

> Those who are given to argument clearly have good material here, even though the forms of their arguments and order of proceeding are very different to what we learn in our studies. As many of them, especially Bonzes, are so eloquent and dexterous in their language, to anyone not knowing the first principles on which their teachings are founded it might often seem as if we were arguing for the same thing.[13]

It is important to note, however, that the intellectual battleground seemed so full of promise to the Jesuits not only because of its quasi-familiar transcendentalist topography, but because it had been opened

[7] I have emphasised here, of course, some key components of transcendentalism per se. Further similarities, including institutional: Josephson 2012: 51; Rubiés 2012: 491.

[8] Francis Xavier was initially taken as a member of a Buddhist sect: Higashibaba 2001: 44; Ōta 2011: 298.

[9] Francisco Cabral, 22 September 1571, Cartas, f. 310; Valignano 1944: 161; App 2012: 51.

[10] For example, Rubiés 2012: 466–8, and noting analogies between the Christian economy of salvation and the Buddhist theory of merit.

[11] See pp. 327–40 for Confucianism in the paradigm.

[12] Paramore 2009: 41, 50; also 2008: 237 on Fabian Fukansai's focus on the ethical system of Christianity.

[13] Luís Fróis, 8 July 1567, Cartas, f. 240v.

out by the particular features of religious life identified in Chapter 3.[14] The 'combinatory' religious field was extremely plural; it was not policed by any equivalent to the Catholic Church, nor was there a stable relationship between the state and a single cohesive structure of institutionalised Buddhism as we shall find in Theravada Ayutthaya. All this promoted the salience of inter- and intra-religious debate. The institutional fragmentation of Buddhism was mirrored in a profusion of soteriological teachings: esoteric ritualism and transparent lay creeds; interior discipline and emotional theistic supplication; paradisiacal heavens and austere self-annihilation. Buddhism therefore presented less a united intellectual front than a scene of ongoing and multi-sided rivalry – something that would be acknowledged as a weakness by Sessō Sōsai (1589–1649) in later anti-Christian treatises.[15] The Zen tradition even provided a form of internal transcendentalist scepticism about many of the fideistic and immanentist elements of popular religious practice.[16] Fróis and Valignano were therefore correct to perceive that the diversity of Buddhist sects opened up a major opportunity for the mission.[17] Certainly the Jesuits believed that they must suppress Europe's own religious and intellectual plurality in order to advance an image of contrastive unity.[18]

It is hardly surprising that the Jesuits rapidly formed an image of the Japanese (together with the Chinese) as the most rational of non-European peoples and therefore the most amenable to conversion through logical persuasion.[19] But analogous cultural forms do not function simply as the bridge to conversion in the way that the scholarship of mission tends to assume. Christianity was new and distinctive enough to give it an edge in this rivalrous environment.[20] But on

[14] See p. 90.
[15] In his *Taiji jashū ron* (Refutation of Evil Teachings) of 1648: Santos 2002: 104.
[16] Fróis III, 202–3 has Nobunaga assume that, like the Zen monks, the Jesuits did not really worship idols and believe in life after death – things evidently for popular consumption only. See App 2010: 136–40 on hierarchies of truth.
[17] Luìs Fróis, 6 March 1565, Cartas, f. 179v; Fróis 2014: 102; Valignano 1954: 143.
[18] Not just Protestantism but the high status of pagan classical authors had to be effaced: Screech 2020: 178; Boxer 1951: 87, 190.
[19] Rubiés 2012: 473.
[20] For example, targeting the no-soul doctrine, a perennial problem of Buddhist metaphysics, as in Fukansai's *Myōtei Mondō*, Baskind 2012: 313, 326.

another level, it brought no revolutionary impact or decisive advantage. Yes, Jesuits could quickly engage opponents in debate – but only to find them frustratingly sophisticated and wily. Christianity could be judged and found wanting according to common transcendentalist criteria such as the rational integration of its main elements or its success in binding ethical cultivation into the attainment of salvation. Its attempt to fuse the underlying nature of reality with an interfering divine agent could seem a compromised version of transcendentalism compared to the apophatic radicalism of Zen. The doctrine of incarnation of the Trinity could provoke laughter.[21] If Fabian Fukansai found something cold and amoral in the 'absolute void' posited by Zen teachings when he was a Christian, after his apostasy he dwelled on the logical difficulties of a personified Deus: To say that he 'expresses this or that quality makes him full of deficiencies'.[22] The fundamental problem of theodicy this entailed was immediately perceived by Buddhist interlocutors, as we see in Xavier's debates in 1551.[23] Why a benevolent god would create demons (the demons that Jesuits would later spend their time exorcising) to torment his children, or decide to subject so many of them to the fires of hell, or so long and arbitrarily delay conveying news of himself to the Japanese – these were all queries that were put to Xavier and were not easily dismissed.[24]

By the end of the century the uncanny similarities between Buddhism and Christianity could be seen as proof of a demonic corruption of the dharma. In this way, an increasingly antagonistic and 'offensive' Japanese discourse now explained Christianity in rather the same way that Christians had come to terms with Buddhism.[25] This was able to mobilise notions of heresy, already loaded with associations of the demonic, that had been available since at least the process of sect differentiation in the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and was heightened by the popularity of the exclusivist Jōdo Shinshū and

[21] Rubiés 2012: 465; compare Gernet 1985 for China. Original sin was also a tough sell: Baskind 2012: 308.

[22] Compare Elisonas 1973: 52, 266. See Kishino 2009: 56–7 on Buddha Nature, and Orii 2015: 203, on logical difficulties with Christian teachings on the immortal soul.

[23] Francis Xavier, 5 November 1549, Kagoshima, Cartas, f. 8; Luìs Fróis, 19 June 1565, Miyako, Cartas, f. 185; Kishino 2009: 54.

[24] Rubiés 2012: 470–1 and 455–6, 480; Boxer 1951: 337.

[25] Josephson 2012: 46–8.

Hokkeshū sects in the sixteenth century.[26] Under the Tokugawa, religious innovation needed little more from Christianity than an emblem of malignant and foreign superstition. Reformist movements in Zen Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism in particular provided the intellectual classes and governing elite with more than enough by way of philosophical satiety.[27]

Elite Conversions and the Intellect

So much for the intellectual encounter in general. How central was it to daimyo conversion? Jesuit reportage, which usually had an edificatory function, is particularly treacherous on this issue. Invariably, their opponents find themselves cast from supercilious disdain to teeth-gnashing despair, the missionaries achieving a calm authority on the page that would have been far less attainable in reality.[28] No less predictably, these accounts endow important neophytes with theological curiosity and a desire to be immersed in Christian doctrine before baptism.[29] The importance of making 'good' conversions was, after all, a matter of some sensitivity in Counter-Reformation Catholicism. In some cases, however, there are enough grains of particularity in the Jesuit sources to suggest that intellectual concerns genuinely mattered.[30]

In one region, indeed, they appear to have had a breakthrough impact. The conversion of certain leading families in the Gokinai (the five provinces around Kyoto) in 1563–1564 has not been included as a central part of the case-study here, partly because it did not involve the conversion of daimyo per se. Nevertheless, it is an important element of the story of Christianity in Japan. In 1560 the Jesuits finally achieved a degree of licence and protection to work from the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshiteru (1546–1565) and were subsequently able to make a few conversions in Kyoto.[31] Even this was enough to stimulate

[26] Josephson 2012: 30–5, 50; Buc 2016: 21; Nogueira Ramos 2020.
[27] See Bitō and Nakai 1991: 413–15; Ooms 1985; Paramore 2009.
[28] For example, Fróis I, 119. But for Jesuits acknowledging tough opponents, see Cosme de Torres, 20 October 1552, Yamaguchi, Cartas, f. 18v. Ward 2009: 157.
[29] Ōmura: Luís de Almeida, 17 November 1563, Yokoseura, Cartas, f. 127v; Luís Fróis, 14 November 1563, Yokoseura, Cartas f. 133v; Fróis I, 278. Ichijō Kanesada of Tosa: Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, f. 352.
[30] See Rubiés 2012 for a sensible methodology. [31] Elisonas 1991: 319–21.

objections from the Buddhist establishment, who called for them to be ejected. A leading vassal of the shogun and follower of Nichiren, Matsunaga Hisahide (1510–1577), responded by summoning the padre, Gaspar Vilela, for a debate or inquiry at Nara. This would reveal the falsity of the Christian teachings and provide a pretext for banishment or execution.[32] Leading the investigation were two prominent intellectuals, the astronomer Yūki Yamashiro no Kami Tadamasa and the Confucian scholar Kiyohara Ekata. Surprisingly, the result was that the two scholars were convinced enough by what they heard to pursue conversion.

Frustratingly, however we lack a real understanding of what happened on this occasion. This is probably because the principal participant was not Vilela, whose language skills were not fit for the occasion, but rather a lowly recently converted Japanese layman named Diogo and an almost blind Japanese man, Lourenço Ryōsai (c. 1525–1592), who had been converted in 1551 and accepted as a lay brother in 1563. Beyond discussion of the existence of the soul, Fróis's account yields almost nothing of the points at issue.[33] In terms of the future strength of Christianity in the region, a third conversion was more significant, that of one of Matsunaga's retainers who had been involved in setting up the inquiry in the first place. Captain of the fort of Sawa in Yamato, Takayama Tomoteru (also known as Zusho, 1531–1596) heard news of what had transpired and quickly made overtures to the missionaries. Baptised in 1564 as Dom Dario, he and his son Takayama Ukon (Dom Justo, 1552–1615) became stalwart Christian samurai. Brother Lourenço played the leading role in preaching to this network of samurai such as Yūki Tadamasa's son Yūki Saemon no Jo (Dom Antão).[34] As a *biwa-hōshi* or itinerant 'lute priest', he seems to have conveyed the Christian message through local song forms that had been deployed for Buddhist story-telling.[35] The Jesuits report that he possessed a 'strange energy and wisdom' and, 'disputing a great number of times with the very learned monks', was

[32] Luís Fróis, 20 August 1576, Usuki, Cartas, f. 364; Fróis I, 246.
[33] Fróis I, 247–52.
[34] On Lourenço: Costa 1999: 87–106. At Iimoriyama he converted Sanga Hōki no Kami Yoriteru (Dom Sancho), lord of Sanga, and dozens of other warriors: Fróis I, 252–66. Lourenço's importance is reflected in the earliest anti-Christian texts, for example, *Batereniki*, Leuchtenberger 2013: 38, 155.
[35] Takao 2019.

never beaten.[36] The European padres were only summoned after the event to perform the ritual duties of baptism. Clearly, they received (or were prepared to record) very little of what actually transpired in these key intellectual encounters from their lay-brothers. Fróis merely gives a programmatic list of the doctrinal novelties of Christianity.[37]

Unfortunately, even when such intellectual dynamics were apparently important, then, they remain obscure. Turning to the daimyo of Kyushu, for whom other concerns were paramount, there are only a few clues that the central question of the nature of the soul and the afterlife could indeed play a role in combatting the authority of Zen.[38] Shortly after the baptism of Arima Yoshisada (as Dom André) in 1576, he was visited by Luís de Almeida and a *dojoku* (native catechist) and asked for 'a lecture on the rational and immortal soul – because around him were many lords and some of them were jenxus (*zenshū*) who believed that there was nothing after this life'.[39] Does this reflect an appetite for a more concrete and accessible form of salvation than that offered by Zen teachings – an appetite that was also being met by the quasi-monotheistic Pure Land Buddhist movements?

Zen was also the principal adversary in the battle for the mind of Ōtomo Sōrin, and there is little doubt that there was an intellectual dimension to his disposition and conversion.[40] Fróis evidently relished describing how powerfully Zen held him in his grip before it was unfastened by the Lord.[41] He has Sōrin proclaim that he had wanted to fully comprehend the highest teachings of Japanese Buddhism before realising that 'the further I entered into the secret of the *jenxus*

[36] Fróis I, 257.

[37] Fróis I, 258. Brevity (as also in Juan Fernández, 9 October 1564, Hirado, Cartas, ff. 144–5) may be more plausible than set-piece speeches.

[38] However, in the late 1570s and early 1580s, Jesuits were increasingly preoccupied with what they perceived as the nihilistic, materialist and atheistic qualities of Zen (Rubiés 2020 and note Baskind 2012: 312–13), which may be influencing these accounts.

[39] Fróis II, 450–4. He had dispatched a vassal to Kyoto to investigate opinions about Christianity. Yoshisada had also discussed the immortality of the soul and Zen teachings in 1563 (Fróis I, 300). This was also a major issue in Fróis's debate before Nobunaga (Luís Fróis, 1 June 1569, Miyako, Cartas, f. 263v). Compare the debate held by the captain 'Gião' in Hyūga: Luís Fróis, 30 September 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 408.

[40] On his great desire for knowledge: Rodrigues 2001: 64.

[41] See above, p. 103. He also bestowed patronage on Zen temples in Kyoto and Usuki: Fróis II, 439–40; III, 8–9, 20–1.

the less mystery and profundity I found there, but rather my heart unquiet and my understanding confused'.[42] This may simply be a rationalisation of how delayed his conversion was, but it is possible that Sōrin was indeed affected by a new consciousness of the question of the afterlife now that he had handed over the day-to-day cares of government.[43] He pursued Christianity with the same seriousness that he had studied Zen; his faith was never in doubt and on occasion it trumped political calculation.[44] The opposite applies to his son Yoshimune in 1578. The set-piece debates he organised were driven more by an instrumentalist desire to weaken the Buddhist establishment than by any searching quality of mind.[45]

Thanks to the unusual openness of religious–philosophical life in the sixteenth century, matters of transcendentalist import – centring on the nature of salvation and the self – might indeed play a role in elite conversion. In these decades such concerns appear to have been most successfully conveyed by Japanese co-adjutants rather than the Iberian missionaries, and in all likelihood were presented in a form that tallied with existing philosophical concerns.[46]

Mundane Disaster and Transcendentalist Conceptual Control

However, Chapter 3 presented a mass of material suggesting that the most contested and bitter arguments at the heart of *daimyo* conversions in fact concerned the immanentist dimension to religious life: the efficacy of spirits and deities to bestow fortune or misfortune on their supplicants. Now, the form of these arguments often turned on rather universal matters of conceptual control, which may be found in entirely immanentist religious cultures too. At the same time, transcendentalist discourses were also mobilised in order to neutralise the threat.

Such arguments became particularly highly charged in relation to acts of iconoclasm.[47] Just as in Kongo or Hawaii, missionaries

[42] Fróis III, 21; Luís Fróis, Usuki, 16 October 1578, Cartas f. 420v.
[43] Fróis IV, 155. [44] Fróis III, 28.
[45] Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, ff. 357v–8,
[46] Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, ff. 350–2v, 352; Fróis I, 272, 281; II, 454; Higashibaba 2001: 21–8. See Schutte 1980, I, i. 221, 237. Cf. Paramore 2008.
[47] This issue is discussed at greater length in Strathern 2020b.

attempted to appeal to the apparent failure of the local deities to react to the destruction of their abodes in order to dramatise their impotence or non-existence. Indeed, the Jesuits imagined that they had a special opportunity to do this because of the way that daimyo were already involved in their own attacks on the Buddhist temples, monasteries and movements that had acquired temporal power during the sixteenth century. In particular, Oda Nobunaga was associated with spectacularly transgressive acts such as the destruction of Enryakuji on Mount Hiei in 1571.[48] But rather than suffering from the vengeance of the gods, Nobunaga's star had risen higher than any others – indeed his ascension was almost uncanny.[49] According to Fróis, the young Yoshimune observed this and sought consciously to imitate the great man.[50]

Nevertheless, the Jesuits do not seem to have appreciated the way in which a transcendentalist discourse of righteousness might function to inflect such arguments. By this means, the destruction of a temple could be represented as *serving* its deity and the ethical-soteriological teachings with which it was associated. Attackers could represent themselves as more authentic agents of these higher truths than the current temple authorities. The chronicle of Nobunaga written by a former retainer in circa 1610 presents the monks of Enryakuji as having been mired in spiritual corruption.[51] They 'cared nothing for penances, ascetic exercises and monastic practices, and felt no shame at the derision of the realm. Heedless of the Way of Heaven and its terrors, they gave themselves over to lewdness, ate fish and fowl, indulged in bribery, and wallowed in gold or silver'.[52] Nobunaga was therefore an agent of *Tentō* – the incarnation of both earthly and heavenly order.[53] Or we could consider a vow at the Usa Hachiman shrine made by Ōuchi Yoshitaka (1507–1551) in 1533 after he had pushed into Buzen and taken control of the area.[54] Yoshitaka attributes his military successes

[48] See Chapter 3 above. [49] Fróis III, 11.

[50] Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas, f. 424. This became part of the Jesuits' rhetorical arsenal. For instance, regarding the conversion of Tawara Chikakata's adopted son, Chikatora in 1577: The 'pagans' had been hoping for divine punishment of Nobunaga for his shrine/temple destruction but 'on the contrary the more that he destroyed them the greater became his estate, fame and riches'. Luís Fróis, 5 June 1577, Usuki, Cartas, f. 377v.

[51] He was an eyewitness to some of the events he described. Ōta 2011: 18–19.

[52] Ōta 2011: 165, cf. 210. Thanks to Kanda Chisato for discussion.

[53] Ooms 1985: 34. [54] Mayo 2013.

to the deity acknowledging the righteous quality of his armies. In a similar vein, when Sōrin attacked and burned down the shrine in 1561, the documents regarding its relations with the Ōtomo indicate that this had no impact on perceptions of the efficacy of the god – and that the Ōtomo themselves were now its pious protectors, the true ethical agents in Buddhist and Way of Heaven terms.[55]

Of course, Christian iconoclasm was quite different to these 'internal' acts of temple destruction, insofar as it was explicitly imagined as a disconfirmation of the power of the deities in question. Yet the availability of a higher ethical narrative would have yielded a great enhancement of conceptual control to Buddhist interlocutors by shifting attention away from efficacy per se. Consider, for example, the way in which Buddhism contains its own transcendentalist disparagement of image worship and its own explanations for the misfortunes of the devout. In this respect it was comparable to Christianity. Most significant here was the widespread apprehension that the world had entered the final age of the Dharma *(mappō)* in which Buddhism itself had degenerated.[56] According to one Mahayana sutra, in this age the bodhisttavas would no longer use sacred images simply as way of guiding lay people to the dharma but would use objects such as sutras and relics as ends in themselves, detached from the real objectives of learning, meditation, compassion.[57] In other words, the text betrays an anxiety about the immanentist misunderstanding of transcendentalist purposes. Fabio Rambelli argues that temple destructions were often justified as means of defending true Buddhism against heretics and imposters who would speed up the End of Dharma.[58] Buddhist establishments were no more immune from the degenerative forces of samsara than anything else.[59] The Mongol attacks of the late

[55] *Ōtomo-shi toshiyori rensho shojō*, document 418, in *Ōita-ken shiryō*, vol. 24; Letter of Yoshioka Nagamasu, 1561, in *Ōita-ken shiryō*, vol. 2, document 17, and Bekki Akitsura and others, thirteenth day of the ninth month, 1562, *ZTHOS* 21, document 223. Also see the petition made in 1568, eighth day of the ninth month: *Ōita-ken shiryō*, vol. 24, document 430.

[56] A 1562 shrine vow by Ōtomo vassals, *ZTHOS* 21, document 223, pp. 114–15. Zampol D'Ortia 2017: 198.

[57] Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 28, citing the *Da Baoji Jing* (*The Sutra of Great Treasures*) by Bodhiruci, circa sixth to early eighth centuries CE.

[58] Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 54.

[59] Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 61.

thirteenth century had been interpreted in some texts as 'skilful means' deployed by the gods to revive the power of Buddhism.[60] This is an excellent example of the capacity of transcendentalism to subvert the normal significance of mundane misfortune by setting it within a higher frame of meaning. Temple destructions and other forms of calamity might *confirm* rather than undermine Buddhist narratives.[61] Setbacks for the faithful are not only accommodated but predicted.

Indeed, the fact that the metapersons whom the Jesuits sought to challenge were not only deities but also bodhisattvas is significant.[62] It may be tempting, for example, to see Hachiman as equivalent to a Hawaiian war god – and therefore prone to disconfirmation on the field of battle, as we shall see was the case for Kūkā'ilimoku. Hachiman was, moreover, strongly associated with Japan itself and its imperial line.[63] His cultic sites had claimed responsibility for the kamikaze that had saved Japan from the Mongol invasion of 1274, and the deity would be invoked again by Hideyoshi in his 1592 invasion of Korea.[64] But he was also profoundly connected to Buddhism as a Great Bodhisattva (*Daibosatsu*), an agent of salvation such that he could be represented in the guise of a Buddhist monk.[65] The history of the Usa Hachiman shrine tells of the military exploits of the god but also how he established the Rite for the Release of Living Beings (*hōjō-e*) as retribution for the slaughter involved.[66] Hachiman was thus not simply a 'god of war' as the Jesuits described him but also a means of dealing with the moral quandary of violence.[67] Indeed, Bernhard Scheid describes him as 'the first kami to embody a vision of transcendental justice'.[68]

[60] Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 84.
[61] See above p. 112 on the conceptual control of the Nichirenshū.
[62] See above p. 92 on *honji suijaku*.
[63] Conlan 2003: 173–4; Turnbull 2006: 52, 57; Jien 1979.
[64] Grapard 2003: 78.
[65] Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003: 13–14, 25; Teeuwen 2000: 95.
[66] The shrine 'reconciled the desire to wage war with the task of bringing peace to the souls of the vanquished': Mayo 2013: 6–7.
[67] Luís Fróis, 27 August 1585, Nagasaki, Cartas II, f. 155; Fróis II, 51; Rodrigues 2001: 97.
[68] Scheid 2014: 47, implicitly invoking Axial theory through Jan Assmann.

Buddhist Resistance: The Status of Buddhism in the Sixteenth Century

Buddhism was formidable not only in terms of the conceptual control it afforded but also because of its institutional and social foundations. Buddhism was once considered to have been at a 'low ebb' in Japan in this period.[69] There are references in the Jesuit sources that may seem to offer support to this notion, but these must be understood in terms of a strange psychology of quasi-identification with Buddhist religious orders. For the charges that the Jesuits laid at the feet of the Japanese monks rehearse those made against Catholic priests and monks by their opponents in Europe: that they were sunk into hypocritical licentiousness and parasitical avarice, eating the fat of the land and giving nothing but the cheap deceits of superstition in return.[70] Even closer to the bone: Their easy promises of salvation were merely a route to achieving worldly benefits.[71] Such comments did not then function as explanations for the faltering status of the monkhood; quite the opposite. Just as Protestants had to explain how Catholic clerics had become so powerful in Europe despite the utter falsity of their teachings, so the Jesuits had to find some way of both rationalising and undermining the authority of Buddhism in Japan.

There are many reasons to be suspicious of such rationalisations.[72] It is possible, however that the Jesuits were also mobilising an indigenous discourse of anti-clericalism, fuelled by the clash between warrior and religious power and the way in which the clerisy had potentially compromised their moral authority through moving so strongly into the temporal sphere.[73] Even monks themselves may have conveyed a sense of regression via the Last Age of Dharma (*mappō*) notion.

[69] Fujita 1991: 254; Elisonas 1973: 29, 'Much of the Buddhist establishment had sunk to a sad state at the end of the Sengoku.' This is comparable to the way European historiography once characterised the pre-Reformation Church: McMullin 1984: 7.

[70] Fróis III, 6. cf. Luís Fróis, Usuki, 16 October 1578, f. 416v, 424v; Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, ff. 350–2v, 350. Francis Xavier seems to have been the origin of this: Rubiés 2012: 473.

[71] Valignano 1954: 66–7; Elisonas 1973: 43.

[72] Fróis 2014: ch. 4. Zampol D'Ortia 2017: 207 shows that Jesuits also used Japanese monks as the anti-type of their own structure of obedience.

[73] See *UP* 145. In other words, Jesuit analyses reflect a common transcendentalist dynamic and not just a Christocentric conceit. The Confucian thinker Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) later argued that the corruption of the Buddhist clergy had

Warrior elites were certainly in a position to judge them harshly by their own standards. When Fróis reports Nobunaga remarking to him on the turpitude, greed and laziness of the monks, it may sound suspiciously convenient for the purposes of Jesuit reportage, but it is clearly echoed by the comments of Nobunaga's chronicler quoted above.[74] Fróis's account of Yoshimune's moves against the monks in early 1578 is similar. Frankly intent on getting his hands on their wealth, he also accuses the monks of laughing at the labours of the lay-folk they depended on, although 'even this would be tolerable if they lived in conformity with the statutes of their sects'.[75] Warrior greed is therefore legitimised by reference to the abnormal wrongness of clerical greed.

That Christianity should arrive in Japan just when such conflicts were approaching their climax undoubtedly provided it with an opportunity it would not otherwise have enjoyed.[76] It is also true, as noted here several times, that the disunity of the Buddhist establishment was critical.[77] But in other ways, the 'low ebb' thesis is very misleading. What emerges from the Jesuit sources instead is a sense of how authoritative and deep-rooted Buddhism was.[78] Imitation was indeed the sincerest form of flattery in this regard: Whereas the Jesuits in China took to dressing as Confucian mandarins, in Japan, it was the manners of the 'bonzes' that Valignano advised they adopt in order to be accepted as men of spiritual and philosophical seriousness. Indeed, he argued that the Japanese had an instinctive respect for missionaries deriving from their attitudes towards their own Buddhist priesthood.[79] When Fróis visited the Gion festival in Kyoto he took note of the eloquence of the preachers and how absolutely they were venerated

allowed the Christians a foothold; he saw the two salvific creeds as fundamentally similar and similarly disreputable: Paramore 2009: 85.

74 Luìs Fróis, 1 June 1569, Miyako, Cartas, f. 260v. Elisonas 1973: 26–7 on Nobunaga's anti-clericalism.

75 Fróis III, 10–11.

76 Note Moran 1993: 62.

77 Yet its myriad forms might also be considered a strength. Nosco 2003: 18–19, the sheer variety 'far surpassed the range of options available in Europe at the same time'.

78 Luìs Fróis, 20 February 1565, Miyako, Cartas, f. 177.

79 Valignano 1954: 132; 1944: 161. There were complex debates over which clothing the Jesuits should adopt: Zampol D'Ortia 2017: 99–169; 2020; Schutte 1980: 1, i, 217.

by the people.[80] There is clearly much more going on here than a Jesuit desire to emphasise how formidable their enemies were for rhetorical purposes. Rather, their progress as missionaries depended on their ability to develop some ethnological understanding of the relationship between religious and social authority in Japan. Fróis has a prominent Gokinai convert reflect,

> I see how great, how mighty, and how all-encompassing are the strength and power of the bonzes, what respect the populace accords them, how deeply founded among all is the regard for their teachings. I see the family relationships which tie them to the nobility and the lords of Japan, their monetary income, their pomp, their possessions. I see so many splendid temples built for the bonzes by the people out of their high esteem and out of their desire for salvation influenced as they are by the cleverness of the bonzes' speech and easy promises of salvation.[81]

Whatever its origins, this may be taken as a decent analysis of Buddhist power: its economic and material basis, for example, its enshrinement in architectural space. Its social implications are registered too: Missionaries frequently observed how problematic it was that the elite families generally had several members placed in the temple and monastery hierarchies.[82] And underlying it all is the monopoly on the satiation of the salvific urge, the sine qua non of transcendentalism. In that vein, the Jesuits also observed how their status derived from their rigorous abstinence – the way they lived out a vision of world rejection.[83]

The Nature of the Opposition

When daimyo decided on fully fledged conversion and iconoclasm, monks often had few options but to submit. Jesuit letters refer sweepingly to monks simply being 'made Christian' in these contexts. Having watched their monasteries razed to the ground, some felt compelled to

[80] Luìs Fróis, 27 April 1565, Miyako, ff. 184–184v, cf. 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas f. 424v.
[81] Sanga Hōki no Kami Yoriteru. Elisonas 1973: 31.
[82] Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas ff. 350–2v, 350; Goble 2007: 54
[83] Francis Xavier, 5 November 1549, Kagoshima, Cartas, f. 13v.

take on similar priestly roles in the new Christian communities.[84] There are also examples of Buddhist monks and scholars who converted to Christianity in a much more voluntary spirit, perhaps drawn in for intellectual and emotional reasons.[85] These would become an excellent source of Jesuit knowledge about the enemy.[86]

But if the way that Buddhism had pushed itself into the political sphere ultimately exposed it to reprisal, it also indicated how much social power it had at its disposal.[87] Despite the largely welcoming attitude that Xavier found among the various orders of monks, in 1549 he wrote that 'it does not seem to me that the laity would oppose or persecute us on their part were it not for the many importunities of the bonzes'.[88] Monkish opposition became a cliché of Jesuit discourse, but it was no less a reality of their predicament. Satsuma, which had swiftly rejected the mission, was consistently represented as a redoubt of 'bonze' authority.[89]

Some monks had already identified Xavier as a threat in 1550. By 1551, there was a popular understanding in Yamaguchi that continuing wars and the outbreaks of fires were the result of the gods' anger at the missionaries' attacks.[90] The Jesuits were soon referred to as demons and foxes; by invoking an animal associated with supernatural trickery and deceit, they were presaging much later stereotypes.[91] But it was particularly when the iconoclastic element of Christian conversion became clear that the stance of Buddhist establishments hardened. One turning point here was in early 1558 when Gaspar Vilela began to undertake mass conversions and transform Buddhist

[84] Franciscso Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas ff. 350–2v, 352; Gaspar Coelho, 5 October 1575, Ōmura Cartas ff. 352v–3; Fróis IV, 499–503; Higashibaba 2001: 15, 28.

[85] Fróis II, 450; III, 139; Aires Sanches, 15 October 1567, Cartas, f. 248v; Ward 2009: 175–6.

[86] João Francisco, 14 September 1575, Ōmura, Cartas, f. 355; Elisonas 1973: 37–8.

[87] Valignano 1944: 140: the bonzes 'are the main instigators and agents of these rebellions'.

[88] Francis Xavier, 5 November 1549, Kagoshima, Cartas, f. 13v. No doubt this also reflects missionary wishful thinking.

[89] Fróis III, 6; IV, 292.

[90] Fróis I, 52; Cosme de Torres, 20 October 1551, Bungo, Cartas, ff. 18v–19. Yamaguchi was a purified area in which many activities were taboo (Conlan 2016: 98), so iconoclasm here was particularly shocking.

[91] Fróis I, 181.

temples into Christian churches in the lands of Dom António Koteda.[92] Buddhist hierarchs responded in kind by arranging for a cross to be hacked down.[93] More effectively, they complained to António's liege, Matsuura Takanobu, who then had the Jesuit ejected. The capital was the site of repeated Buddhist opposition to the missionaries, in the form of petitions to the emperor, shogun and then Nobunaga to deny them permission to reside or preach there.[94] Briefly given permission to preach from 1560, they still faced considerable opposition and in 1564 were ejected again after pressure from the monks of Mt. Hiei.[95] In the surrounding provinces it was sometimes nuns, *bikkhuni*, who took up the fight.[96]

Clearly such mobilisations had their limits. Turning to the three principal daimyo cases here, their ability to 'create' tens of thousands of Christians among their subjects through top-down directives stands as a striking testimony to the ability of coercive might to trump religious authority.[97] Nevertheless, it must be appreciated how much neophyte daimyo worried and procrastinated over the political consequences of their actions – and how much they were right to do so.

When the prospect of establishing a church in Ōmura was first put to Ōmura Sumitada he fretted about the consequences of bringing down a Buddhist monastery, noting that some of the monks were nobles with important relations and that this would cause a popular commotion.[98] After the lord's baptism in 1563 as Dom Bartolomeu, Cosme de Torres was compelled to write a treatise against the arguments of the bonzes that everywhere Christianity went a trail of destruction, conflicts and calamities followed.[99] This treatise was somewhat mistimed given what happened next. A number of Dom Bartolomeu's vassals led by Gotō Takaakira rebelled, and he was forced to flee and could not reclaim his position for three years. One spur to this revolt was an act of intimate iconoclasm: Dom Bartolomeu had refused to burn

[92] Fróis I, 115–16.
[93] Gaspar Vilela, 1 September 1559, Cartas, f. 68v; Higashibaba 2001: 46–6.
[94] Deal and Ruppert 2015: 177: The court's conferral of the status of the royal cloister on Honganji in 1559 was stimulated by the Christian threat.
[95] Fróis I, 246, 252–3; II, 267–71.
[96] As with *bikkhuni* relatives of the wife of Dom Kuroda: Fróis I, 267.
[97] Francisco Cabral referred to the fact that the common people had no choice but to follow their daimyo into the faith because they were dependent on him for their use of land: Zampol D'Ortia 2017: 238.
[98] Fróis I, 281. [99] Fróis I, 295.

incense before the statue of his adoptive father (and Takaakira's real father) and burned the statue itself instead.[100] A few months later, in November, the church and Jesuit house in Yokoseura were set on fire. Luís Fróis was among the missionaries who now had to flee to the ships, escaping from the vassals of Dom Bartolomeu who 'had risen against him because he was a Christian'.[101] When the much-beleaguered lord turned to more widespread iconoclasm in 1574, this stimulated an anti-Christian conspiracy involving the monks.[102]

In Arima, Yoshisada first allowed missionary work in 1563, and Luís de Almeida had initially had some good success in the Shimabara region with the local lord's permission.[103] But soon the Jesuits saw the devil setting to work moving his followers, the monks, to work against Christianity and stir up the population.[104] The monks spread the rumour that the Jesuits ate men, indeed were demons in the shape of men, and left a trail of destruction whither they went. Three large monasteries in the region joined forces to try to stop him preaching; they broke crosses, stole them from the houses of converts and seriously disrupted the mission.[105] No surprise then that Yoshisada only converted long after this in 1576 and did so surreptitiously, his heart fluctuating amidst anxieties about the reaction of his noble relatives and 'the bonzes powerful and esteemed by all'. Fróis tells us that while he could now discount the false promises of the monks to secure him victory in battle, the trouble they could foment against him was less simple to set aside.[106] Eventually Yoshisada was baptised in a low-key way in Kuchinotsu. When he pushed the head of a monastery to depart and handed it over to the padres, again he was countered by the monks, who tried various means to have it reinstated.

[100] Fróis I, 333–4, who also identifies the monks' reaction; Luís Fróis, 14 November 1563, Yokoseura, Cartas, f. 132v; and see Elisonas 1973: 416, endnote 14.

[101] Fróis I, 339.

[102] Francisco Cabral, 12 September 1575, Nagasaki, Cartas, ff. 350v–1. Dom Bartolomeu had held back previously for fear of the monks. In the aftermath, the daimyo begged Gaspar Coelho to stay to neutralise the monks through conversion, offering him a cook so that he could avoid being poisoned: João Francisco, 14 September 1575, Ōmura, Cartas, f. 354v.

[103] Fróis I, 304.

[104] Fróis I, 307.

[105] Fróis I, 308–19. One of the chief centres of opposition was a monastery-shrine on the volcano Mount Unzen, a popular pilgrimage site: Fróis II, 452.

[106] Fróis II, 452, and see 459 for the central role of monks in shaping legitimacy.

When Yoshisada fell ill and died some eight or nine months after baptism, then, factions were riled up. Such was the atmosphere that his Christian mourners arrived at his funeral with arms bristling at their sides.[107] Clearly, his son Arima Harunobu succeeded him on a wave of monastic and popular displeasure, and – now also personally swayed by the empirical logic of his father's unfortunate demise – he embarked on a policy of counter-iconoclasm, targeting Christian establishments. There were mass apostasies.[108] It was only the appearance of existential threat that spurred Harunobu to reverse his stance and accept Christianity.[109]

The extent of anti-Christian opposition in Bungo should already be clear, but it is worth underlining that Ōtomo Sōrin was aware from the start of the political risks incurred by conversion. The image of missionary cannibalism in Bungo had already surfaced by 1553.[110] Sōrin had to produce an edict against throwing stones at the missionary houses. This was at the point when Christianity was only making inroads among the sick and lowly. When the turning point among the elite came in 1576, with the baptism of Chikaie (Dom Sebastião), the monks complained that this was the biggest insult the king could make to the laws of Japan.[111]

In sum, even those daimyo who did choose to convert knew that it came at a high cost. The Buddhist establishment fought back in diverse ways, using rumours, diplomacy, persuasion and threat, leveraging their connections among the noble and warrior elites while inciting anger among the populace at large.[112]

The Rejection of Christianity

The case studies considered in this book, the three main houses of Kyushu that converted between 1560–1580, do not represent the whole story of the Christian encounter in Japan by any means: The

[107] Fróis II, 464–5. [108] Fróis II, 465–7. [109] See above, and Fróis III, 134.
[110] Duarte da Silva, 20 September 1555, Bungo, Cartas, f. 44v; cf. the monks' uproar and denunciations of witchcraft in Fernão Mendes Pinto's narrative set in Bungo (1989: 474–82), albeit potentially fictionalised (Rubiés 2012).
[111] Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, f. 357.
[112] Compare the violence in Gotō in 1576: Aires Sanches, 8 September 1576, Hirado, Cartas f. 373v. On Jōdo Shinshū counter-evangelisation in Nagasaki in the 1590s: Tronu 2012: 130–1. This sect was identified as the principal enemy of Christianity by Lourenço Mexia, 20 October 1580, f. 560.

number of Christians continued to grow after this point, even as Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu issued intermittently enforced restrictions and prohibitions. There are various estimates of the sheer numbers involved, but Alessandro Valignano, the Jesuit Visitor to the East, estimated that there were approximately 150,000 Christians in Japan by 1583. The figure may have reached 350,000 in 1600, out of a population of circa 12 million, while most scholars suggest that the numbers grew at least until 1614.[113]

However, the further we proceed into the period of Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa shoguns, the more the autonomy of the daimyo diminishes and the less well they fit the terms of comparison deployed in this book. It is true that religious diplomacy always retained a hold among the new rulers of Japan, allowing Christianity to be tolerated for the purposes of trade. But Valignano came to repudiate it as a tool of conversion for lesser daimyo insofar as it deepened suspicions about Christianity's political subversiveness. What worked during years of civil war became a liability as the political centre once more acquired mass.[114] Note that while Valignano's reorganisation of the mission and programmatic cultivation of accommodation has tended to attract scholarly admiration, the breakthrough conversions of Kyushu (together with the 1560s Gokinai elites) were accomplished before his impact was felt.[115]

Eventually, the reassertion of central authority would not only change the conditions under which Christianity could be successful – it would destroy them. Under the Tokugawa bakufu, all aspects of life were to be re-organised in the service of stability and harmony, and the control of religion was central to this enterprise.[116] The direct threats of popular Buddhist radicalism and vast temple complexes were crushed, and the diverse institutions of Buddhism more generally were subordinated to a single government-controlled hierarchy. The social power of Buddhism was thus reduced and subjected to state surveillance.[117] The new lords of Japan came to feel that Christianity required a more complete response still.

[113] Üçerler 2008: 164; Boxer 1951; 78, 187, 230, 320–1. In a sense, this was the period of greatest hope for Christianity in Japan: Oliveira e Costa 2003: 45–71.
[114] Boxer 1951: 99.
[115] Valignano may have influenced the conversion of Arima Harunobu (1580) but this had little to do with his strategy of accommodation.
[116] Lieberman 2009: 444–5; Totman 1993: 50–4; Paramore 2009: 4.
[117] Hur 2007; D. Williams 2009.

Duty and Disloyalty

The threat presented by Christianity was epitomised by the iconoclastic exploits of its converts.[118] In one sense, their actions had been prefigured by the behaviour of the exclusivist, militant sects of the Jōdo Shinshū *Ikkō ikki* and the Hokke followers of Nichiren.[119] Sōrin's wife explicitly compared the Christians with these leagues in 1577.[120] But the ruthlessness with which Christianity swept aside the most elemental features of Japanese religious pluralism was without real parallel.[121] In 1580, a senior Ōtomo vassal, Tachibana Dōsetsu, articulated as much in a letter to thirteen southern retainers of Bungo:

> In Japan, it is already written how to deal with the temples and shrines. As a result, it does not even rise to the level of asking whether using images of buddhas and *kami* as firewood was good or bad, but one ought to naturally know it is senseless and beyond such distinctions.[122]

Further correspondence reveals that Yoshimune had defended his actions by comparing himself with Nobunaga (confirming the report of Fróis), but his retainers had replied that Nobunaga's violence had not been directed against the gods and buddhas per se but was determined by whether the temple was a military enemy or not.[123] There was no precedent for destroying temples and shrines that were entirely blameless. Yoshimune had been dragged into the mire with his father who had 'destroyed the buddhas and kami' by attacking the temple and shrines of his own sect.[124]

In 1587, Hideyoshi's expulsion edict made a similar point:

> Japan is the land of the Gods and so it is undesirable that evil doctrines from Christian lands be propagated. To approach the inhabitants of our lands,

[118] See Strathern 2020b.
[119] Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 57; Turnbull 2006: 93–4. Tsang 2010: 93–4 notes that the Honganji sect believed that 'no gods (*kami*) or buddhas other than Amida had any real power over them' – yet another feature of comparability with Christianity.
[120] Luís Fróis, 5 June 1577, Usuki, Cartas, f. 384.
[121] Paramore 2015: 408. Contrast with the 'medieval' mode of iconoclasm in Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 53.
[122] *Tachibana-ke monjo*, 16 February 1580, *ZTHOS* 24, document 406, pp. 214–15.
[123] *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, pp. 230–1; cf. Kanda 2014: 102.
[124] *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, p. 238.

make them into followers and destroy shrines and temples is unprecedented behaviour.[125]

The edict referred to the outrageous way in which the masses had been stirred up and demanded that the *bateren* (the Jesuits) return to their home country in twenty days. A notice for internal consumption issued the day before had begun by railing against forced conversions by Christian daimyos and decreed that persons above a certain wealth level had to receive permission before they converted. Christianity was compared with the Jōdo Shinshū movement of Honganji: 'The bateren sectarians ... are even more given to conjurations with external elements than the Ikkō sect.'[126]

Hideyoshi's edict came as a shock; it was an abrupt departure from his generally benign approach to the missionaries thus far.[127] His ire against forced conversions was immediately inspired by the iconoclastic excesses of Takayama Ukon, who was promptly stripped of his fief and exiled.[128] It also came the day after a visit from Gaspar Coelho, the vice-provincial, who had travelled from the Jesuit-controlled enclave of Nagasaki in a boat armed with artillery. Nagasaki, donated to the Jesuits in 1580, was, in that sense, little different to the autonomous fortified towns and regions that had been controlled by the *Ikkō ikki*.[129] Coelho had sought on occasion to cohere Christian daimyo to act in concert, and Nagasaki sat amidst a coalescing belt of Christian territories in the western reaches of Kyushu.[130] It is unsurprising then that Nagasaki and other Jesuit strongholds were taken over as part of the series of measures that Hideyoshi announced afterwards, in which crosses and rosaries were banned from samurai dress and church property was confiscated.[131]

Hideyoshi never did much to enforce his expulsion, nor did he seek to extend his persecution of Christian daimyo beyond Ukon himself – though his blast was enough to secure some apostasies, including that of the ever-unsteady Yoshimune. Even the texts of his edicts betray a

[125] Bowring 2017: 15; cf. Fróis, 20 February 1588, Arima, Cartas II, f. 209v.
[126] Elisonas 1973: 118.
[127] One of his daughters was Christian: Kitagawa 2007.
[128] Elisonas 1973: 125–31.
[129] Elisonas 1973: 119. However, Christian lords did not challenge the nature of warlord rule in the way that the *Ikkō ikki* did (thanks to Kiri Paramore).
[130] Elisonas 1991: 352; 1973: 115. Kawamura 2009: 152, 160–1.
[131] Boxer 1951: 148–9.

concern to balance the taming of Christianity with due recognition of the value of Portuguese trade. Hideyoshi's vacillating attitude has stimulated much discussion as to his underlying motives and strategy.[132] Perhaps once he had impressed firmly on Christian lords that they must render unto Caesar, it was unnecessary to push any further.[133]

But when other parties seemed no longer to abide by the rules of the game, a show of force was necessary. In 1596, it was the way that internal sedition seemed to be connected to the external threat of the Spanish–Portuguese empire that spurred Hideyoshi to action.[134] Precisely this fear of Christianity as a fifth column had already been articulated by Sōrin's wife after his baptism in 1578.[135] This association between Christianity and Iberian expansion was far from fanciful.[136] In the other case studies here involving Catholic imperialism – Kongo and Ayutthaya – rulers swiftly reached a similar conclusion. In Japan, it was given weight by the appearance of a Spanish ship, *San Felipe*, which landed in October 1596 laden with cargo and was promptly appropriated by the local daimyo.[137] According to the Portuguese at least, while Hideyoshi was deciding what to do about the matter, the pilot-major of the ship admitted to his officers that elsewhere the Christian converts made by friars had indeed assisted Spanish conquest. Franciscans had entered Japan in 1593 accompanying an embassy from the Philippines. Breaking the Jesuit monopoly and eschewing their methods, they concentrated on the common man and disregarded discreet accommodation. They were now identified as potential traitors and yielded the first Christian martyrs in Japanese

[132] Elisonas 1973; 114–32; 1991: 359–64; Screech 2012: 16–17.

[133] Luke Roberts's (2012: 6–7) analysis of the manipulation of *uchi* (inside) and *omote* (ritual interface) forms of relations must be applicable here.

[134] Screech 2012: 5–6 is sceptical of 'fifth column' fears at this juncture, emphasising rather the English intervention in 1613. But note earlier indications of such suspicions in Hideyoshi's letter to the governor of the Philippines (Colín 1900–1902 [1663], II: 703), in which Christianity is a ruse for political subjection; the prescient comments of Valignano (1954: 147) on the anti-Christian arguments used by Buddhist monks; the *Myōtei Dialogues* of 1605 (Baskind and Bowring 2015: 191); and the first of the anti-Christian texts, the *Bateren-ki* c.1607–1614 (Leuchtenberger 2013: 37).

[135] Luís Fróis, 16 October 1578, Usuki, Cartas ff. 417v.

[136] In the 1580s/1590s, some Jesuits did argue for summoning Spanish military power: Hirayama 2021: 169–73.

[137] Elisonas 1973: 135–40; 1991: 364–5; Screech 2012: 6–7.

history. In the end, after an initial order to execute 170 of them, six friars and twenty others were crucified in February 1597.[138]

Hideyoshi renewed his proscription of Christian preaching, but again any real persecution lapsed thereafter. Although there are anti-Christian elements in some of Ieyasu's earlier edicts, as discussed below, it was not until 1612–1614 that the decisive rejection of Christianity took place, in a series of announcements addressing an expanding circle of recipients. These culminated in the proclamation on the Deportation of Priests of January 1614.[139] This time, the bakufu meant what they said, and the missionaries were banished (some went underground) and Christian lords exiled.

English interventions over 1613–1616 played their part in this.[140] The Tokugawa were at war with the Toyotomi over Osaka castle, whose walls were garrisoned by many Christian samurai. The English furnished the Tokugawa with stock items of Protestant paranoia as well as munitions, including visual depictions of Catholic perfidy such as the Spanish armada of 1588 and the Gunpowder Plot. In this vision, the pope was a theocrat hungry for world domination who sought to depose non-Catholic kings with the aid of his duplicitous agents, the Jesuits, and theories of tyrannicide. A series of misdemeanours involving Christian lords had strengthened the association with surreptitious and criminal behaviour.[141] It was principally the bond between lord and retainer that was the concern here.[142] The Jesuit mirage of a unified and disciplined Christendom now lay in pieces just as Japan's unity was being reassembled.

All this crystallised the sense of Christianity as an inherently threatening ideology that subverted proper instincts of loyalty.[143] Prospective daimyo converts themselves had wondered about the new lines of authority. According to Fróis, Yoshimune had asked whether, 'making himself a Christian king, he would be obliged to send from here an ambassador to the Pope in order to give obedience, given that he was so far away? On matters of war in which he had some doubt, would he be obliged first to consult with ecclesiastics?'[144]

[138] See Berry 1982: 223–8 for possible changes in Hideyoshi's personality.
[139] Paramore 2009: 52–6; Screech 2012: 7–8. [140] Screech 2012.
[141] Boxer 1951: 314–7. [142] Hirayama 2021: 169.
[143] Hasegawa Sahioye's memorial of 1613, in Boxer 1951: 317.
[144] Fróis III, 31.

The letter of the southern retainers to Yoshimune's advisors, circa 1580, conveys a more fundamental and abstract sense that political and religious loyalty were two sides of the same coin:

> It is said that the *kami* relies on people's respect to strengthen its authority; people rely on the *kami*'s virtue to obtain good fortune. It is the same for the lord–retainer relationship: the lord relies on his retainers and the retainers revere their lord. Only when both sides follow this rule will the principle of hierarchy be maintained and the country be properly governed.[145]

Social order depended on being seen to observe both forms of hierarchy. Sōrin had broken his own religious rule; father and son had created a topsy-turvy world; the ethic of filial and feudal piety was distressingly breached.[146]

The image of Christianity developed in later anti-Christian texts as a vehicle for sequestering Japan for foreign powers through the lure of wealth, deceptive teachings and supernatural power must therefore have its roots in our period.[147] Beyond their suspected loyalty to outsiders, it was the ultimate allegiance to a jealous God that was alarming.[148] And as the persecutions were enacted and resisted, as Christians refused to apostatise on pain of torture and death, the true horror of this inner discipline became apparent.[149]

The position of Christianity in Japan, as a potent source of social power alienated from government, had restored it to its pre-Constantinian state before it had become processed into an ideology of rule.[150] Just as in ancient Rome, its transcendentalist vision of higher purpose presented a threat to a state that could not situate itself in relation to the same vision. By not countenancing a minimal

[145] *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, p. 228, and see p. 238. Xia-Kang Ziyi translation.
[146] Thus, it would be legitimate for Yoshimune to breach filial piety by not following his father, for Sōrin had already rubbished hierarchical principles. See the appalled comments in the first draft of Hideyoshi's letter of 1591 to the viceroy of India (De Bary 2005: 170), for example, 'It is by applying humanity and rightness that the essential ties between lord and subject, father and son, and husband and wife are perfected … Should you want to learn about the gods and the Buddhas in depth, kindly ask, and I will explain.' Also: Ooms 1985: 46; Elisonas 1973: 47–9; McMullin 1984: 229.
[147] Josephson 2012: 32, 46; Leuchtenberger 2013; Paramore 2009; Nogeuria Ramos 2020.
[148] Üçerler 2022: ch. 8.
[149] Reflected in Ieyasu's 1614 proscription: De Bary 2005: 174.
[150] The Jesuits were highly conscious of this: Üçerler 2022: 175.

integration into a state-policed religious order and by threatening the religious peace, it appeared to deprecate political hierarchy.[151] Christianity in this mode is something of a universal irritant to ambitious men of state.[152]

The Official Discourse of Rejection: Indigenism and Transcendentalist Sufficiency

The public pronouncements of Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa shoguns about Christianity afford some insight into the grounds on which they came to repudiate it. It must be emphasised that these were conveyed in diverse texts written over forty years by different hands with different goals and for both internal and external consumption.[153] The following analysis adopts a somewhat distant perspective, then, in order to show certain recurrent dimensions (both immanentist and transcendentalist) to the discourse they developed. While assertions of identity, tradition or ideological superiority must be related to the highly charged political contexts in which they are enunciated, this does not render them trivial 'secondary' effects of strategic manoeuvres.[154] They are called upon because they have their own power; and they will in turn shape future political possibilities.[155]

Recently, scholars have also been inclined to emphasise that Christianity was not inherently incommensurable with Japanese culture.[156] To be sure, little of the encounter makes sense otherwise, from the conversion of a learned daimyo such as Sōrin to the composition of sophisticated Christian treatises in Japanese. As always, existing concepts could be used to comprehend the new religion, and, as

[151] Fróis I, 318, for a hint of Christianity's egalitarian reputation.

[152] Could Nobunaga and Hideyoshi have solved the situation as the emperors of Rome did – by converting? Innovative and transgressive, they were already antagonistic to over-mighty Buddhist establishments, and missionaries saw encouraging signs (Schutte 1980, vol. 1, ii,: 118–31; Luís Fróis, 1 June 1569, Miyako, Cartas, ff. 261–5). But this was wishful thinking, as Kanda Chisato (2016) perceives. Nothing suggests that they ever seriously considered the idea.

[153] For example, Buddhism is more fundamental to Ieyasu's vision than to Hideyoshi's.

[154] Paramore 2009; 52 argues that early Tokugawa anti-Christian discourse was primarily aimed 'at legitimizing and buttressing the existing social order' rather than responding to an ideological threat. Presumably, it could operate at several levels at once.

[155] As 'practice theory' would indicate.

[156] Paramore 2009; Screech 2012: 6.

intellectual interactions grew more complex, Christian thinkers found ways of inserting their positions within debates already underway in Japanese culture. The vitriol of the seventeenth-century anti-Christian texts is striking, but they had their heyday after the faith had been largely suppressed.[157] But does it make sense to detach the fundamentally political logic of the rejection of Christianity from an invocation of its alienity?[158] The rhetoric of rejection drew force from an 'indigenist' vexation at the particular ways Christianity had proved resistant to assimilation, especially its compromise of feudal and filial piety, and its iconoclastic excesses. A number of these texts are clearly concerned with a newly reflexive sense of Japan's place in the world.[159]

Once again, 'national' issues were prefigured in the conflict in Bungo. Even the Jesuit sources reveal occasional indications that Christianity was seen as contrary to the 'laws of Japan'.[160] For the southern retainers criticising Yoshimune, 'we Japanese people find the ideas of Deus unthinkable'; the craze for the Sect of the Southern Barbarians 'does not fit Japan'.[161] They were prompted by Tachibana Dōsetsu (in 1580), who had referred to traditions reaching back to the twelfth century in criticising temple-destruction: 'Japan is the land of the *kami*; in private and public matters, and in religious belief, we must act without going against the proper principles and Way of Heaven.'[162]

Indeed, the single most consistent theme running throughout all the subsequent anti-Christian proclamations is the idea of Japan as the

[157] Paramore 2009: 6–7, albeit see Nogueira Ramos 2020 (and below) for a qualification. Indeed, it was not until the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1639 following Shimabara that the taste for dressing up Portuguese style at festivals became taboo. Toby 2019: 240.

[158] Massarella 2000: 235. Massarella 1996 interprets Christianity as a political not cultural threat. Berry 1982: 92 sees no detection of 'philosophical threat'. Elisonas 1973: 117 argues that Hideyoshi's 1587 expulsion was not a xenophobic measure but a matter of political control.

[159] Compare Kouamé 2020, paragraph 8, on Sūden's 1614 text. Japanese geography and anthropology had transformed in recent decades: Toby 2019.

[160] Dom Paulo was upbraided after his temple destruction for taking up 'a law unknown in Japan, which we do not know if it fell from the sky or was born from the earth' (Fróis IV, 154); compare Francisco Cabral, 9 September 1576, Kuchinotsu, Cartas, f. 357. See Nosco 2003: 17. Paramore 2009: 65 on later anti-Christian discourses conveying 'the idea that "traditions" inherent to "our country" underlie preservation of the current order'.

[161] *ZTHOS* 24, document 408, pp. 236–8.

[162] Mayo 2015: 50.

land of the gods (*kami*).[163] This is how Hideyoshi began his edict of 1587, issued for internal consumption, yet his letter drafters insisted on it no less in correspondence with the Portuguese viceroy in Goa in 1591 or the governor of the Philippines, Don Francisco Tello, in 1597.[164] These ideas then became enshrined into the official projection of Japan's image and were reiterated by Ieyasu in 1605, again pointing out the problem with iconoclasm.[165] In Ieyasu's letter of 1612, the phrase is *Shinkoku* (the Divine Nation), while the edict two years later asserts that 'Japan, land of the Gods and the Buddhas, reveres the Gods, respects Buddhas, fulfils the way of benevolence and Justice.'[166] *Shinkoku* thereby invokes the protection of the *kami*, the timeless tradition of venerating them and an inherently divine character to the land itself.[167] The Christians repudiated all.

Even in these short quotations, it is apparent that the properly native system set in contrast to Christianity was some amalgam of Shintō, Buddhism and *Tentō* thought. In truth, the exact nature of the relations between the three was the subject of much argument, ambiguity and change over time (indeed, that it was *not* Christianity was therefore a good way of conceiving what acceptable religion was).[168] All the proclamations, however, reflect a general elevation of Shintō. Hideyoshi's vision in particular drew on the capacity of Yoshida Shintō to endow the land and traditions of Japan with a unique

[163] Toby 1984: 215–17, for previous invocations.

[164] For 1587: Bowring 2017:15. For 1591: Murakami 1966: 26–9, also see Takagi 2004: 60; Ooms 1985: 46. (The letter was altered from this draft, on the advice of Valignano that it was diplomatically unacceptable). For 1597: Colín 1900–1902 [1663], II: 703. For the diplomatic context of these letters: Tremml-Werner 2015: ch. 7.

[165] 'Our land is called the land of the gods, the idols (what you call Ydolos) which have been have passed on since the age of our ancestors and are venerated greatly. I cannot turn my back on this great history and destroy [our tradition].' Murakami 1966: 90–1 (all translations from this volume by Thom Van Dam). Cf. Ooms 1985: 47.

[166] For 1612: Shimizu 1977: 282–3. Thanks to Richard Bowring for translation of this text. The 1614 edict was issued at the behest of Tokugawa Ieyasu but under Hidetata's seal: Paramore 2009: 56. Compare Fabian Fukansai in 1620: Hibbard and Hiraishi, trans. 1963: 6.

[167] Kouamé 2020, para. 16.

[168] Paramore 2009: 71 on the fluid, ad hoc way that non-heretical or 'orthodox' thought was formulated in different texts.

numinousness.[169] This was fundamental to the growing status of 'indigeneity' as a means of evaluating the status of any spiritual tradition.[170] It is hardly surprising that the foreignness of Christianity should matter when we consider that Buddhist and Confucian thinkers had to defend themselves against disparaging references to the foreign origin of their traditions in the seventeenth century.[171] In Hideyoshi's letter of 1597 to the Spanish governor of the Philippines, only Shintō is mentioned as the counterpart to Christianity. What if Japanese came to your country and started spreading Shintō there – he asks, rather reasonably – how would you feel as the lord of it? Shintō is the source of all social order in Japan since the beginning of time, Christianity 'a diabolical law from foreign kingdoms'.[172]

Significantly, however, Shintō had been strengthened as a countervailing ideology by its absorption of traits from transcendentalist traditions.[173] In the 1591 letter, composed by Hideyoshi's chief drafter of diplomatic correspondence, the Zen monk Sessō Sōsai, the kami even seem to be placed outside the normal laws of Buddhist space-time, unaffected by aeons of degeneration or regeneration. They took ontological priority; they were 'the root of all being' and 'if you understand Shintō, then you automatically understand the Dharma, Confucianism and Taoism'.[174] There is a sense in which this amounts to a transcendentalisation of the gods, elevated into an abstract principle far above empirical contingencies. This discourse of rejection drew upon a widespread understanding of the fundamental equivalence of all these principal traditions – a universalist position – and a more particular argument that these found their ultimate origin in Japan. The country was thereby portrayed as a unique generator of spiritual

[169] Sonehara 2008: 22–4. On the importance of Yoshida Shintō for Sūden's 1614 edict: Kouamé 2020.
[170] On indigenism in Sri Lankan history: Strathern 2007a.
[171] Ooms 1985: 92, 153; Totman 1993: 169–74; Nakai 1980: 160–3.
[172] Colín 1900–1902 [1663], II: 703; Ooms 1985: 47.
[173] Yoshida Shintō had absorbed notions of the 'purity of mind as no-mind', metaphysical and ethical arguments, and an 'offensive' self-definition against other traditions. See Bowring 2005: 419–22; Roberts 2012: 140; Teeuwen and Rambelli 2012: 80; 2003: 35–7; Ooms 1985: 100–5. All the traditions were engaged in a competitive process of 'hierarchical inclusion' (Josephson 2012: 26).
[174] Murakami 1966: 26–9; also see Takagi 2004: 62; Ooms 1985: 46; De Bary 2005, II: 170.

truths for the world rather than a receptacle for great traditions from elsewhere.[175]

Nevertheless, in most of the official pronouncements considered here, such metaphysical manoeuvrings served to entrench as well as redefine Buddhism's place. The first expulsion edict (1587) refers to Christianity's 'violation of the Buddhist law'.[176] Ieyasu's letter of 1612 reiterated the principle that the kami were manifest traces of the buddhas, as if to underline the extent to which their status was beyond negotiation.[177] The text of the 1613 proscription of Christianity, drafted by another Zen monk, Ishin Sūden, argued that Buddhist teachings thrived more in Japan than any other country.[178] In Ieyasu's proclamation of 1614, the 'heresy' of Christianity is seen as inviting this-worldly misfortune both through the judgement of Heaven and the working of karmic retribution.[179] Japan is presented as the land in which Buddhist law had been most firmly established.[180] It was in this edict that the ways in which Buddhism would function as a vehicle for state control of religious life were laid down.

It is true that in the ideological sphere as well as the political, Buddhism never attained its earlier commanding heights. It had lost its 'givenness' to some degree and was rendered vulnerable to the attacks of explicitly Confucian thinkers in the emerging field of Tokugawa ideology.[181] But in no sense could rulers simply ignore Buddhism or choose to wish away its continuing social power.[182] It was one of the features of the landscape that they simply had to come to terms with. Christianity, on the other hand, not only had much shallower institutional roots in this landscape but refused to share ground, placing itself outside of the pan-Asian set of

[175] Teeuwen 2000: 97; Sonehara 2008: 220–1. [176] Elisonas 1973: 116.
[177] Shimizu 1977: 282–3.
[178] Sonehara 2008: 221; Screech 2012: 8–9 for the unusual nature of this document.
[179] Offending the laws of both Shintō and Buddhism, Paramore 2009: 57.
[180] Kouamé 2020: para. 52.
[181] Hayashi Razan, for example, suggested that Buddhism had been used as an exploitative 'instrument of political order'. Ooms 1985: 91–2, 152, 156. On mid-seventeenth-century anti-Buddhist moves in the political sphere: Ooms 1985: 191; Paramore 2009: 35.
[182] Üçerler 2022: 279: Ieyasu saw that Buddhism 'defined Japanese religion in the eyes of the populace'. More broadly, chs. 8 and 11 chime with the thrust of the argument here.

commensurable transcendentalisms.[183] The thrust of Tokugawa policy aimed in exactly the opposite direction, to further 'the combinatory urges in Buddhism, Shintō, Daoism, and even Confucianism to such a degree that many rituals, deities, and ideas are impossible to pin to any one tradition'.[184]

Christianity was therefore discredited according to existing transcendentalist principles. Ieyasu's letter to the Viceroy of New Spain in 1612, drafted by Sūden:

> As for the way you put to use your dharma in your country, its purport is alien to us and bears no relation to our country. The Buddhist scriptures say: 'sentient beings who have no karmic tie [i.e., who have no knowledge of the Buddhist teachings] find it difficult to reach enlightenment.' Those who are intent on spreading your teachings should consider this and cease. It is not fitting that they should use it in such a way.[185]

In this vision, the long-established Buddhist understanding of salvation rendered Christianity both alien and unnecessary. In ethical terms, too, Christianity was repeatedly disparaged, and here Buddhism was supplemented by Confucianism as a source of higher civility and morality. The 1614 proclamation at one point refers to the Five Constants as upholding social morality ('the exterior world'), while for the interior world (the salvific realm of the self) 'we believe in the great teaching of baskets [the teaching of Shakyamuni]'.[186] By these standards, Christianity could appear as an imbalanced fanaticism lacking in basic humanity and righteousness.[187] The 1612 letter dwells on what the country *already had* by way of its religious foundations, which sustained ethical behaviour through divine intervention (and possibly

[183] The point is not that the soil of Japan was inherently alien ground for Christianity – an oft-criticised suggestion of Shūsako Endō's novel *Silence* (Endō 1976) – but that it was covered with anciently established Buddhist vegetation. Contrast Elisonas 1973: 253 with Paramore 2009: 12.

[184] Muffling the hard edges between the rival systems in terms of official or *omote* engagement: Roberts 2012: 137–8. Paramore 2009: 61 refers to seventeenth-century texts upholding 'a Shintō-Buddhist synthesis as a Japanese national religious culture opposed to Christianity'.

[185] Shimizu 1977: 282–3 translated by Bowring. For other translations see Kuno 1940: 303–5; Screech 2012: 7–8.

[186] Kouamé 2020: 53–4, also noting the afterlife torments awaiting those who abandoned the gods and the Buddhas.

[187] Hideyoshi's 1591 letter: Murakami 1966: 26–9. Also Toby 1984: 217; Ooms 1985: 46.

karma), and indeed an entire social infrastructure of oaths, truth-telling, benevolence and propriety.[188]

Self-Divinisation

Christianity was thus rendered incompatible not so much with tradition as with the 'traditional' forms that the unifiers of Japan were busy assembling. This is particularly so with regard to the sacralisation of their authority.[189] While Christianity had made the potential tension between divine and political hierarchies unusually explicit, self-divinisation was a means of fusing them. It was most clearly achieved through posthumous cults.[190] In accordance with his will, a shrine was erected at Hōkōji to Toyotomi Hideyoshi as *Toyokuni daimyōjin*, thus eroding the distinctions between the land of Japan, the gods and his own being.[191] This used primarily Yoshida Shintō formulations, while his successor Tokugawa Ieyasu opted for a posthumous title, *Tōshō daigongen* ('Great Incarnation Shining over the East'), that conveyed a strong Buddhist claim of bodhisattva-hood but which amounted to the same conflation of personhood, land and divinity.[192]

It is clear that Hideyoshi already had his posthumous deification in mind around the time of the expulsion edict in 1587. The following year, he explained to Jerónimo Pereira, the captain of the carrack for 1588, that the real reason for expelling the Jesuits was because of the damage their teachings did to the basis of lordly status: For the kami and hotoke of Japan were none other than earlier lords who 'because of their great deeds and victories had come to be to be worshipped as true kami by the people'. Now the current lords of Japan wished to be worshipped in the same way. Derision of the gods therefore implied derision of Hideyoshi after his death.[193] Hachiman, with whom

[188] Shimizu 1977: 282–3; Takagi 2004: 61. [189] See Chapter 3, pp. 119–23.

[190] On the sixteenth-century origins and seventeenth-century development of posthumous deification: Bitō and Nakai 1991: 393–5; Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003: 38; Roberts 2012: 143; Boot 2000: 162; Ravina 1999: 26; Sonehara 2008: 221–5; Pitelka 2016: ch. 6.

[191] Ooms 1985: 50.

[192] Ooms 1985: 49–50, 105 (Hideyoshi: 'Tenka, the realm, is not Tenka; I am Tenka'), 162–85.

[193] The Jesuit Organtino Gnecchi-Soldo had claimed that Hideyoshi's chief ambition was 'to make himself worshipped, and to be considered as one of the most principal kamis that there are in Japan'. Gaspar Coelho, 24 February

Hideyoshi identified and who was himself the deified form of the emperor Ōjin, may have been on his mind.[194]

However, there are a few clues that Hideyoshi was inclined to promote the imagery of his divinisation during the last years of his lifetime.[195] He may have been influenced here by the experimentations of Nobunaga (discussed above as a controversial case), as another low-born man who had hauled himself to greatness; he certainly seems to have likewise deployed a somewhat transgressive idiom of authority. As Stanca Scholz-Cionca points out, while emperors and even shoguns before and after him cultivated silence and immobility, his self-presentation tended to the impulsive, histrionic and playful.[196] In a letter to the Governor of the Philippines in 1593, Hideyoshi explained that:

> At the time of my birth, the sun entered my chest. This miracle shows that you people, all the way from east until the west, should submit yourselves to me by prostrating yourselves before me.[197]

This may be an appeal to a more direct connection with the sun than the imperial line (descended from Amaterasu) could boast.[198] Thus had the cosmos marked Hideyoshi out for universal imperial authority – fitting for one who had embarked on an invasion of Korea and China. His chronicler would later observe that Hideyoshi's appearance

1589, Kazusa, Cartas II, f. 258v, and see Boscaro 1973: 200. The Jesuits were presumably influenced by Renaissance euhemerism deriving ultimately from Hellenistic sources. It seems that Fróis (1 June 1569, Miyako, Cartas, f. 263v.) had tried to use the euhemerist argument to dismiss the *kami* as mere men to Nobunaga, but to no avail. This does not mean that the Jesuits simply invented the Hideyoshi material. See Bitō and Nakai 1991: 393–5 for the general context.

194 Note Hideyoshi's rites honouring Hachiman after 'victory' in Korea, 1590: Ooms 1985: 44.

195 Ooms 1985: 45. Ooms points to Hideyoshi's 1597 letter to Francisco Tello (Colín 1900–1902 [1663], II, 793) as asserting from the beginning that Japan had 'venerated its gods and rulers through Shintō'. However, the text seems to read that Japan 'has taken Shintō as its God and Lord'. Thanks to Zoltán Biedermann for discussion.

196 Scholz-Cionca 2017: 188–94. If the emperorship resembled the cosmic mode of rulership, Hideyoshi opted for an eclectic–ludic version of the heroic mode.

197 Murakami 1966: 59. Compare another letter of the same year: Elisonas 1981b: 223.

198 Thanks to John Breen for discussion. Compare the story of the origin of the Chinggisid dynasty in the light-struck womb of the princess Alan Qo'a: Moin 2022: 737; Brack 2023: 104.

on the parade ground 'made all present feel within them the resonance of a god', like an earthly manifestation of Sumiyoshi.[199] It would seem that it was through Nō theatre that Hideyoshi could explore these themes most emphatically, as in the deity play *Yoshino mōde*, which was performed during the culmination of the procession to the Yoshimizu temple on Mount Yoshino in 1594. The play was a divine epiphany, in which an apparently human figure is later revealed to be Zaō Gongen, the Shugendō protector deity of the mountain. Hideyoshi played the role of the deity, hidden and revealed.[200]

Naturally, one may question how literally and how widely such theatrical associations resonated. But it serves to show how the enduring element of immanentism in Japanese culture could be turned to the task of ruler aggrandisement. The daimyo did not need to abolish or occupy the emperorship to start spinning a web of sanctity around themselves and their lineage – and they certainly did not need to become Christian. In the form of Christianity that arrived in Japan, by contrast, kings may be exalted in their righteousness but could not hope to for a share in divinity themselves.

Conclusion

Set against the otherwise dismal record of Christianity among the ruling powers in Asia, the successes of the Japanese mission stand out as a striking exception. It took persecution by the Tokugawa bakufu for the faith to be rolled back. And yet it failed to capture the convictions of more than a small minority of daimyo and never won over those who wielded power from the centre, rather exhausting their tolerance instead. Both dimensions require explanation.

The *diplomatic power* of Christianity was vital to the establishment of its foothold in Kyushu. The play of religious diplomacy became unusually compelling here due to the crucial role of the Portuguese in the silk trade and the association between the movements of their ships and the Jesuit fathers. This only mattered in turn because of the internecine competition created by the state of civil war. Daimyo in

[199] Ōta 2011: 391; cf. Ooms 1985: 178.

[200] Scholz-Cionca 2017: 202–3, though the casting was much more complex. Hideyoshi took a similar role in a deity play written for a procession to Mount Kōya, but a violent storm was interpreted to mean that the deity was unhappy with the blasphemy.

desperate straits, such as the Ōmura and Arima, were willing to grasp hold of any means of enhancing their situation. The strong connection with trade continued to help protect the mission at the level of the policies of the warrior-unifiers. However the association with foreign power and the willingness the Jesuits had shown to intervene in politics in the *sengoku* now became increasingly grave liabilities in the conditions of unification.

The importance of *immanent power* in shaping encounters with Christianity was traced in detail in Chapter 3. Their lives regularly punctuated by existential moments, warring daimyo were open to experimenting with new ritual systems and arguing about their observable outcomes. This held as true for Sōrin, whose climax to conversion was accompanied by dramas of healing and war, as for Ōmura and Arima. Yet Christianity did not have a decisive advantage over the other systems in this regard. Such advantages may take two forms. The first occurs when a proselytising society appears to be endowed with superior mundane powers which may be attributed to supramundane causes.[201] But the Portuguese were not involved in the great territorial battles; Christian daimyo lost battles as well as winning them; and it was the godless and godlike 'unifiers' whose progress was most strikingly sustained by the winds of Heaven.[202] The padres brought tantalising new rites of healing and exorcism – generating a rush of enthusiasm in 1570s Bungo in particular – but no fundamental medicinal or immunological advantages.

The second means of obtaining advantage in a field of 'empirical religiosity' is through the conceptual control afforded by transcendentalisms. Thus, Sōrin's adherence to Christianity even when all seemed lost following the battle of Mimigawa, sustained by Jesuit appeals to the trials inflicted by God to purify his sins.[203] Yet, the Shintō-Buddhist deities were not easily disconfirmed either: They too had been integrated into overarching ethical and soteriological schemes. Buddhism offered various conceptual mechanisms, including the hidden righteousness of karmic logic and the deformities of the *sāsana* in the 'last age', to explain the misfortunes of those who had appealed to the kami and the bodhisattvas or to account for the

[201] See *UP* 236–8. Possibly, the novelties of Portuguese firearms and ships lent some credence to their supernatural claims in some early encounters: Hino 2004: 823.

[202] Nobunaga and Heaven: Ōta 2011: 42. [203] Fróis IV: 379.

unavenged destruction of their abodes. Opponents of the missionaries could even use associations of supernatural power against them. In Hideyoshi's letter of 1591, the notorious *bateren* had come to Japan 'seeking to bewitch monks and lay-folk, men and women alike'.[204]

Daimyo were also engaged in building new forms of state authority – comparatively, a promising context for ruler conversion. The *social power* of religion was both threat and opportunity to daimyo in this context. Here, Christianity may have distinguished itself by offering a new form of social rectitude, with a direct relationship between God and man at its heart and burnished by Jesuit propaganda about Europe – fuelling Sōrin's dream of utopia in Mushika. But that very social power increasingly appeared threatening to the warriors who were intent on monopolising loyalties, and there were many other visions of personal and societal ethics upon which to found a new order, as the Tokugawa ideologues soon showed.[205] Concerns about legitimacy were not always paramount for sixteenth-century daimyo. Drawing their strength from new – even 'early modern' – accumulations of military and economic might, they can seem endowed with the power to remake the religious realm at will.[206] There were a few decades from the 1550s in which some particularly ruthless daimyos seemed to flaunt their disregard for the traditional religious sensibilities.[207] But the daimyo also had to contend with the capacity of religion to render the exercise of authority normative and compelling, and they started to experiment with what were in effect new forms of sacred kingship as a result. The posthumous cults of Hideyoshi and Ieyasu, for example, were facilitated by the deeply immanentist capacity of Shintō – and Christianity could offer little by way of compensatory divinisation.

There is little direct evidence that the *intellectual power* of Christianity drove the conversion of the daimyo of Kyushu, although it must have mattered to the Gokinai elite converts.[208] The matter of posthumous salvation is as much emotional as intellectual, of course,

[204] Murakami 1966: 26–9.
[205] For a subtle exploration of Confucianism: McMullen 1999.
[206] Varley 1999: 70. [207] Conlan 2016: 103.
[208] Meanwhile, the *cultural power* of Christianity was not negligible, but the association with foreign models of civility was more of a handicap than an asset.

and genuine questions about the nature and immortality of the soul may well have acquired significance. Buddhist pluralism created an open intellectual field for Christianity to enter – yet one crowded with competing traditions of textual learning, logic and metaphysics. Pure Land Buddhism whetted the appetite for afterlife desiderata – indeed, more generally, its particular extrapolation of transcendentalism into a form resembling Christianity in certain ways may help to explain a level of receptivity among Japanese.[209] At the same time, of course, alongside a multitude of other Buddhist soteriologies, it functioned as a continuing means of satiating that appetite. Buddhism had its own 'offensive' qualities to deploy, and both sides could have recourse to demonic imagery to castigate each other.

There were several features of Buddhism in Japan that weakened its defences against elite conversion. Its heterogeneity ensured that, in contrast with Theravada Buddhist societies, there was no single institutional entity in Japan that could orchestrate resistance, often little fellow feeling among the various sects and no agreed doctrine upon which a single voice of contradiction could be presented to Christianity. Furthermore, Buddhism's hegemony was incomplete. It shared ground with a somewhat-transcendentalised but still deeply immanentist Shintō, and latterly with Confucianism too. An indigenist discourse of the laws and gods of Japan was one way of defining what had to be defended from Christianity.

Indigenism could even be used to criticise Buddhism, indicating a stubborn conceptual gap between Japanese-ness and Buddhism that finds no parallel in Theravada lands.[210] This was symbolised by the emperorship, which never became reducible to Buddhist kingship.[211] This conceptual gap was stretched further by the *sengoku*, insofar as it pitted daimyo against the temple complexes and lay leagues that had

[209] Baskind 2012: 308, fn.1 notes Sueki Fumihiko's argument that Pure Land Buddhism paved the way for Christianity.

[210] Rambelli and Reinders 2012: 68–9.

[211] The survival over the very long term of Shintō as a named immanentism and the emperorship as a fundamentally immanentist model of sacral rule must be understood as intimately linked. Both were restored and reformulated first by the re-unifiers (Hideyoshi/the Tokugawa) and then again in the Meiji restoration (Paramore 2009: 165). The endurance of the emperorship in this form may be the fundamental reason why Shintō retained a degree of conceptual independence, for example.

asserted themselves into the political vacuum.[212] The default tension set up by transcendentalism between the state and the clerisy had broken out into outright antagonism, partly fuelled by warrior determination to grasp the financial capacity of temples and monasteries for themselves – as the Ōtomo clashes with the Usa Hachiman shrine demonstrated in microcosm. In terms of the sheer social power at its disposal, Buddhism was not at a low ebb when Xavier arrived; it was at the point of high tide and would have to crash on the rocks of daimyo authority. It was amongst these frothing waters that Christianity found some temporary purchase.

For various reasons then, Buddhism's ability to hold rulership to account was weakened and was certainly less comprehensive than in Theravada lands. Yet this was as much because of the transcendentalisation of Buddhism as because of the immanentisation that is normally underlined in the more sociological readings of Japanese religiosity.[213] Indeed, the case of the Christian daimyo would indicate that Buddhism was a force to be reckoned with, nonetheless. It retained a part in the vision of truly Japanese religion that Ieyasu in particular set against Christianity in his personal pronouncements – even if the broader discourse of rejection upheld a system of social order rooted in various deeply inter-twined immanentist and transcendentalist forms. Buddhism endured as the favoured vehicle for organised mass religion. Even those daimyo who had tried to enforce Christianity in their realms had done so amidst much anxiety about the grave risks to their authority. Institutionally, Buddhism was a massive presence at all levels of society. It had a variety of messages of salvation, which still held great appeal. And it began to oppose Christianity as soon as Christianity revealed itself to be an existential threat.

The last exhalation of public Christianity in Japan occurred during the 1637–1638 rebellion in Shimabara and the Amakusa islands. Shimabara had been the domain of the Arimas, but in 1614 they had been replaced by the Matsukura family. Angered by new taxes and the persecution of their faith, tens of thousands of Christian peasants rose up in rebellion, and they were beheaded in their droves when it was eventually put down. Portuguese traders were expelled. When, nine

[212] Cf. Massarella 2000: 235, noting a contrast with the Theravada world.
[213] See above; compare Nogueria Ramos 2020: 81.

years later, the Portuguese returned in the shape of an official embassy, the Nagasaki authorities were anxious enough about the effect on the religious and political loyalties of its population to call upon Sessō Sōsa, a Rinzai Zen Buddhist monk, to preach and quench any lingering attachment to Christianity that might now be rekindled.[214] From the notes of Sessō's popular sermons, and his *Refutation of Evil Teachings* written shortly afterwards, the following themes become clear.[215] They are noted here to underline how far they had been presaged in the first great period of daimyo conversion, 1560–1580.

First, the major battleground was identified as the realm of the empirical and the miraculous – it was in the narratives and counter-narratives about the potency of the gods that hearts and minds would be won or lost. Sessō had been born in Bungo a decade after the battle of Mimigawa and was abbot of a temple in Usuki where so many of the fiercest arguments must have played out. However, there was also, second, a transcendentalist means of undercutting such merely immanent considerations by their ethical reframing: They have become the stuff of sorcery, malignancy, the demonic.[216] Third, otherworldly salvation mattered too, but rival soteriologies could be mustered in response, ones that were not vulnerable to the weaknesses of the Christian account of a personal omnipotent creator god.[217] Fourth, the fundamental comparability of Christianity as a transcendentalist tradition needed to be acknowledged – but it was neutered by presenting the faith as a mere perversion of the True Law. Jesus, we are told, was a disciple of a Buddhist monk but twisted what he learned into heresy. Fifth, Jesus had done this for cynical and insurrectionary ends, to overthrow Rome and create a new expansionary empire.[218] Thus, Christianity was a trojan horse of political subversion and foreign machination. This was exactly how Christianity would come to be seen, too, in Ayutthaya by the end of the 1680s, the subject of the next two chapters.

[214] Nogueira Ramos 2020.

[215] These drew on earlier texts held at the Tafukuji temple, including the *Kirishitan kanagaki* (which contains the *Bateren-ki*, discussed above, p. 146).

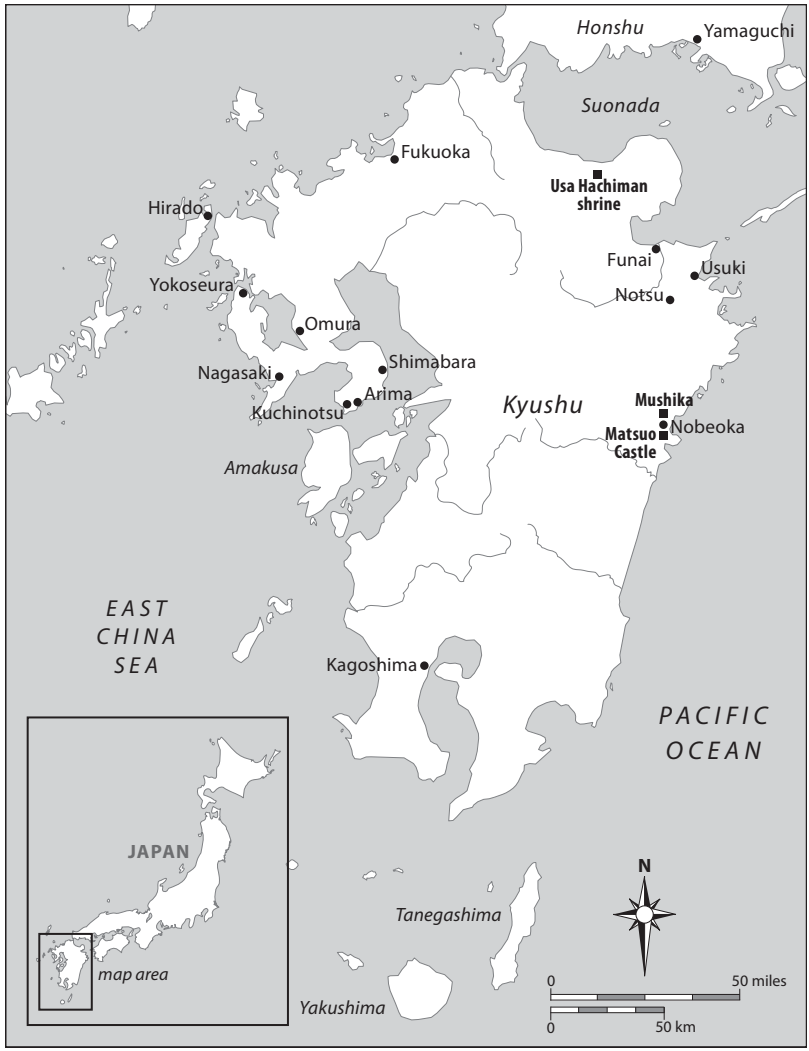
[216] Nogueira Ramos 2020: 65, 81–2.

[217] Nogueira Ramos 2020: 81.

[218] Nogueira Ramos 2020: 66–79. Suzuki Shōsan's *Ha Kirishitan* (also 1640s) argued that Christianity was a Buddhist heresy, without providing a historical narrative. Sessō noted that the missionaries had attacked Buddhism because it 'preaches future salvation and infernal condemnation, in which aspects it is similar to their doctrine'. Santos 2002: 103.

JAPAN

Figure 3.1 Ōtomo Yoshishige or Sōrin, depicted as a Buddhist monk. Silk painting, probably produced shortly after his death in 1587.
Photograph and permission courtesy of the Ōita Prefecture Museum of History and Zuihō-in (Daitoku-ji).



Map 3.1 Japan.
Map by David McCutcheon.

5 *Reclining Buddhas and Restless Missionaries: Narai of Ayutthaya and the Encounter with Christianity, 1660–1690*

The revolution which occurred in the Kingdom of Siam in the year 1688 is one of the most famous events of our times whether it is considered from the point of view of politics or religion.

Vollant des Verquains[1]

The previous chapter ended with the Tokugawa regime bearing down upon the intransigent Christians of Japan. Some of their number fled to Siam. In the great city of Ayutthaya, sixty miles or so north up the Chao Phraya river from the port of Bangkok, they found one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world: a teeming entrepôt in which foreigners were drawn into almost every aspect of the state and their various religions freely acknowledged.[2] The Japanese Christians found their niche as royal bodyguards.[3] Among those with Japanese blood was Maria Guyomar de Pinha, who claimed descent from the first person baptised by Francis Xavier in Japan.[4] In 1682 she married an extraordinary Greek adventurer by the name of Constantine Phaulkon. Phaulkon had escaped his homeland to become a 'powder monkey' in the East India Company (EIC), pitched up in Siam with nothing to his name, and then engineered a vertiginous ascent to become the most powerful agent in the court of Ayutthaya after the king himself. Phaulkon is a central player in the drama described in this chapter and the next. It was he who helped draw the diplomatic energies of the king, Phra Narai, towards France and Louis XIV.

But towering above this great marketplace of Ayutthaya and the constant movement of money, and all its foreign-born peoples

[1] Vollant des Verquains 1691: 1.

[2] 'Ayutthaya' refers to the kingdom and the capital city. 'Siam' (the region) and 'Siamese' (the people) are vague terms used by Europeans, following Malay or Peguan usage (Lieberman 2003: 324), but the vagueness is useful and much scholarship prefers it. On the term 'Thai' in our period, see below p. 220.

[3] Van der Cruysse 2002: 62, 119.

[4] Le Blanc 1692, I: 42; Bèze 23.

including scheming European East India companies and adventurers on the make, settled Persian merchant families, Chinese traders, Makassarese princes and Malay troops – towering above them all were the prangs of the great wats, the temples and monasteries of the city. In their shade, multitudes of buddhas sat or reclined, the graceful forms of the latter undulating for dozens of feet in length, utterly still in their survey of the pointless chasing of desires. Europeans marvelled at how much of the city's wealth ended up sunken into the sacred architecture of the landscape around which they moved and traded.[5]

The Buddha reclined; perhaps the monotheist powers thought he was asleep. At least, they tried to ignore his massive presence when they sought to capture this kingdom for their faiths. Both the Persians and the French sent formal embassies in the 1680s with the explicit aim of converting King Narai. These years represent the climax of foreign influence in Siam – but they ended with a jolt. What the French called the 'revolution' of 1688 shoved them out of the kingdom, aroused a wave of popular anger against Christianity and brought a determinedly Buddhist sovereign to power. Phaulkon had lorded it over all other men for a few years; he ended his life in a staked enclosure with the head of a co-conspirator tied around his neck, tortured horribly. He was finally split in two by an executioner's sabre. His proud wife was reduced to a palace servant.

The French public were rather fascinated by these events and the land of Siam more generally, to judge by the large number of texts written about them by French bishops, missionaries, ambassadors and officers, cumulatively describing the kingdom and its court in great detail. The perspective of the court of Ayutthaya is much more difficult to recreate given the absence of all but a handful of Thai sources, but the French have left us with a wealth of evidence that easily outstrips what we have for the previous two cases. This chapter is able to adopt a much more fine-grained focus as a result.

With hindsight, the attempt to convert Narai may seem preposterous: This at least is the judgement of contemporary scholarship. One scholar, for example, notes that the missionaries were blind to the fact that religion and monarchy were connected in Siam in the same way that they were in France.[6] But in what sense, exactly, was this relationship the same? It cannot be simply that both kings were sacralised, for

[5] Bhawan 2007: 88; Van der Cruysse 2002: 316. [6] Love 1999: 26.

kings nearly always are. Was it, after all, so mistaken for the missionary Pierre Lambert de La Motte to be emboldened by the example of the Roman emperor Constantine, whose temporal power before he converted had been so much vaster and whose sacred status was hardly unelaborated? Our explanation must begin – and, in a sense, end – with the role of the sangha.

Buddhism and Sacred Kingship in Ayutthaya

The Status of the Sangha

Buddhism has a much older history in mainland Southeast Asia, but at least from the fourteenth century, the emerging Thai kingdoms acknowledged a version that derived its initial impetus from Sri Lanka and that we now identify as the Theravada tradition: It clung to the Pali scriptures and commentaries and maintained a relatively unified institutional form.[7] Such was the importance of this Sri Lankan influence that the Siamese often explained to travellers that Buddha himself had come from that island.[8] This was the source of the transcendentalist dimension to Siamese religion: It provided a central epistemological and soteriological pillar to which all other forms of religious life could be tethered.

The European ability to comprehend Thai Buddhism as a philosophical system was a halting work-in-progress, which finally attained relatively impressive levels in the French reports of the 1680s.[9] But the central importance of Buddhism as a social fact was picked up almost immediately by visitors to the region.[10] Nicolas Gervaise, for example, was struck by how simple the material life of most Siamese was and yet how striking 'the wealth of their almost infinite number of pagodas [temples]'. This fact together with 'their eager care to provide abundant subsistence for the Talapoins who serve them, the inviolable veneration in which the monks are held, and the privileges which they

[7] Skilling 2007 for reservations regarding the term 'Theravada'.
[8] Loubère 141, 411. Choisy 1995: 224. The connection was commemorated in Wat Phra Kaeo, established in the fourteenth century: Tambiah 1976: 76, 97.
[9] Albeit still limited in various ways of course, not least because of the linguistic barrier of Pali. Van der Cruysse 2002: xviii, 147, 314; Lopez 2013: 80–95.
[10] Portuguese accounts: Flores 1995: 132; Boxer 1969a: 128.

accord them above other men, show how attached they are to their Religion'.[11]

This statement condenses many features of European reports, monotonously unanimous over the seventeenth century: the tens of thousands of pagodas and their opulence, majesty and beauty ('it touches one to the quick to see one single idol richer than all the tabernacles of the Churches of Europe'); the great numbers of monks and the tremendous social status that they enjoyed.[12] The latter was most evident in the special terms by which they were addressed and the way they carried themselves: It was not for them to make way for another in the street, and they would salute no laymen, not even the king himself.[13] They were honoured by all 'as though they were living gods'.[14]

The prestige of these 'Talapoins', as the French called Theravada monks, owed something to their learning, especially in Pali, the language of the scriptures.[15] But overwhelmingly, European witnesses, from hard-nosed Dutch company men to French ambassadors, attributed it to the austere and admirable regulation of their lives.[16] Underpinning these rules, from celibacy to their spartan vegetarian diet, was a transcendentalist deprecation of mundane pleasure.[17] When the ambassador Simon de La Loubère lists their principal maxims – self-restraint, decorum, modesty, sobriety, abstemiousness, peacefulness, gentleness, dignity, honesty, compassion, sincerity – what more Christian virtues could be imagined?[18] The most revered monks were the forest-dwellers who most faithfully dedicated themselves to the business of salvation away from human society.

In Japan, Jesuits seized on evidence of tensions between the monks and the laity in order to advance an aggressive critique of Buddhist monasticism as a cynical masquerade, making liberal use of European anti-clerical discourse in the process. We find relatively little of this in

[11] Gervaise 65.
[12] Tachard 202, 245–56; Gervaise 214 on the wat or pagodas; Choisy 1995: 219–20; Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 91.
[13] Loubère 397–8, 439, 452; Gervaise 190, 306; Tachard 416; 1689: 214.
[14] Giovanni Filippo de Marini (1663) in Polenghi 2007: 56.
[15] Choisy 1995: 309. [16] Loubère 397; Gervaise 192; Forest 1998, III: 265–7.
[17] Loubère 372.
[18] Loubère 437–9, and compare Gervaise 171 on Buddhist prescriptions, 'some of which share in the finest and most difficult aspects of the morality of the Gospels, such as self-contempt'.

Siam.[19] European observers instead marvelled at the power of monastic discipline, and La Loubère even explicitly ruled out the idea that the monks were imposters.[20]

Some of the more enquiring accounts suggest that the virtues of the monastery had somehow seeped out to shape the natural character of the populace into obedience, philosophical calm and ethical decorum.[21] It is naturally difficult to arrive at a generalisation as to just how profoundly the peasantry of outlying areas were inducted into a Buddhist worldview, but European sources indicate a network of rural monasteries and in no sense do they convey a religion of the elite only.[22] Instead, just as the Church had become a presence in all aspects of life in Europe, so here too the sangha met a very wide range of needs.[23] Most important was the provision of education, with temples teaching basic skills of literacy, numeracy, Pali and perhaps history.[24] 'Royally approved editions of major religious texts' were disseminated across society through this extensive public education network.[25] It became a widely held aspiration for all boys to be placed in a monastery for at least some time, particularly for elite families.[26] Female monastics existed too, and Gervaise comments on the respect they were accorded.[27] However strongly marked the distinction between laity and sangha was in symbolic terms, the boundary between the two in terms of personnel was therefore significantly porous.[28] The town-dwelling monks were expected also to preach to the laity, particularly on the holy days of the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month, when they could attract great crowds.[29]

At the heart of the relationship between monks and laity was the understanding that alms could be exchanged for merit. This is what enabled monks whose function was to escape society to exercise so

[19] The Jesuit Nicolas Gervaise (188–94) comes close, pointing to the attractions of life without corvée labour and taxes, and reports that 'the monks are now very lax and have, so it is said, greatly degenerated from the virtue', perhaps picking up on a local discourse of Buddhist decline and millennial renewal. Compare the Franciscan Merolli (Smith 2011: 367).

[20] Loubère 421. [21] Loubère 291, 397; Choisy 1995: 306–7.

[22] Lieberman 2003: 313–15.

[23] See Alberts 2013a: 68–9; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 198–203. See Forest 1998, III: 415–18 on the fundamental role of the sangha in village communities.

[24] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 201. [25] Smith 2019: 173.

[26] Lieberman 2003: 314. [27] Gervaise 211–12. [28] Loubère 296.

[29] Gervaise 167–9; Loubère 375–6.

dominant a role within it. As always, the inherent instability of transcendentalist aspirations resulted in a paradox: The very unworldliness of monks meant that they were dependent on the laity for their daily subsistence and must beg for food every day.[30] As one Dutch observer remarked, 'It is a cause of great amazement to our nation to see the heathen display such love for one another.'[31] Again, this helped to establish a more general societal ethic of charity.[32] This daily practice and the fact that most males were ordained for a period of time meant that the interface between laity and clerisy was arguably significantly thicker than that in Christian Europe.[33]

One major difference between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism is the virtual absence in the latter of sectarianism based on different traditions of scriptural interpretation – there is nothing like the exuberant theological variety of Japan. But we do have some intriguing evidence for an elite–popular distinction in terms of the understanding of the Buddha in Gervaise's narrative:

> The monks who are the custodians of this Doctrine wrap it in a thousand fictions to render it more venerable by virtue of its obscurity. Thus the common people, who usually revere what they do not understand, are ignorant of all the mysteries of Metempsychosis, and are content to adore the Statue of Sommonokodom [Buddha] made of bricks and mortar, to which is attributed all the good and evil that happens to them. The King and some Lords of the Court, more enlightened than the rest, have made an entire Theology particular to themselves, their mental penetration allowing them to discover that Sommonokodom having been mortal could not have become God; thus they consider him as a person of eminent virtue who has left them excellent maxims and good examples.[34]

There are aspects to this that reflect misunderstandings. The suggestion that the teaching of rebirth (and therefore karma) had little purchase among the common people is misleading: It was deeply embedded in popular culture traditions such as the *jātakas*.[35] But the reference to royal circles clearly reflects the Theravada teaching that Buddha attained *nibbāna* as a mortal and has not endured in a form that can

[30] Le Blanc 1692, I: 11–16.
[31] Cornelis Van Nijenrode in Smithies, ed. 1995: 13–14. [32] Gervaise 172–3.
[33] Thanks to Chris Baker for this. [34] Gervaise 164–5.
[35] The account is also influenced by the dubious notion that the king's circle was informed by a higher providentialism, see pp. 215–6 below.

assist the faithful.[36] We know that around this time there were rationalist understandings of the nature of salvation that we might otherwise be tempted to associate with modern versions of Buddhism. It is such evidence that has allowed Saichol Sattayanurak to argue that signs of a certain philosophical approach to Buddhism most clearly evident in the early Bangkok era already can be seen in the commercialised milieu of Ayutthaya from around Narai's period onwards.[37] This dimension to Narai's milieu will help explain his response to the mission.

Gervaise's extract is plausible too in its indication that the popularisation of Buddhism had however yielded an immanentist theism. The immanentisation process extended to monks themselves who became magical specialists providing healing, protection, good luck through the provision of written phrases in Pali, magical symbols, charms, potions and holy water. They could be skilled too in fortune telling and divination.[38] The transcendentalist virtuosity exemplified by the forest monks was equated with the capacity for miraculous power.[39]

But immanentist needs could also be met in multiple ways; both local spirit cults and deities imported from the Indic world were allowed to flourish alongside Buddhism – or within its embrace. Meanwhile astrology served to subject all aspects of life to a simulacrum of control. And here, as we have seen in all other case studies, there were beliefs in forms of evil magic, in possession and exorcism, in spirit healing and omen reading and so on.[40] Even ancestors wavered into sight every now and then in the form of ghosts (*pretas*): the soteriologically lost, ceaselessly hungry.

The King in Buddhist Imagery: Righteous Virtuoso and Divinised Bodhisattva

A Theravada discourse of righteous kingship may have been first mobilised with urgency as part of the dynamic whereby the Thai courts

[36] Loubère 414 also notes the paradoxical immanentist theism of prayers to Buddha, for nirvana is 'not a place but a manner of being'.

[37] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 247, drawing on the work of Saichol Sattayanurak. In a text framed as a dialogue between King Phetracha (Narai's successor) and a leading monk, Phra Phuthakosajan, *nibbāna* is described as purely an extraordinary psychological state (rather than a heavenly place). Nidhi 2005:131.

[38] Gervaise 199–201; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 202; Dhiravat 1984: 95–6.

[39] Tachard 404–11; Loubère 372; Gervaise 184.

[40] Loubère 212, 259–60, 265–8.

broke away from the model of rule developed at Angkor to the east from the twelfth century, developing a new vision of a coherent moral community organised by submission to the *dhamma*.[41] *Dhamma* encompasses righteousness; the Buddhist teachings; the cosmic law they reveal; and 'beyond that again, the truth that transcends all historical and empirical realities, nirvana'.[42] In a poem written in the later fifteenth century to commemorate 'The Defeat of Lanna' we see that kingship is now firmly associated with making 'the Triple Gem [Buddha, *dhamma* and sangha] bestride the world'.[43] The king as *dhammarāja* was rendered an embodiment of almost monastic standards of morality encoded in the list of ten royal virtues.[44] In ideal terms, then, kings were beings who not only provided the conditions under which the soteriological quest could proceed but also illustrated what the end product of that quest should look like.[45]

This is all strikingly transcendentalist, but note that the ethical comportment of the king was connected to the ability to establish the conditions for this-worldly flourishing in ways that bring us close to an image of cosmic kingship.[46] Hence Narai is praised in the palace chronicles not just for defending the realm and administering justice but also because 'the rains accordingly fell in proper sequence with the seasons, food cereals were accordingly abundant throughout the regions of the countryside'.[47]

There was moreover a constant tendency to equate the figure of the Buddha with the figure of the king. In the sutras, the pair looked after complementary domains or 'wheels' of activity: the *cakkavatti*, a world-ruling monarch, turned the wheel of dominion, and the bodhisattva turned the wheel of morality.[48] Although this distinction nicely encapsulates the ontological breach typical of transcendentalism, the

[41] Gyallay-Pap 2007: 77; Kulke 1993: 375; Tambiah 1976: 98–101. See Strathern 2019a on the divinised and righteous forms of Thai kingship.
[42] Tambiah 1976: 41.
[43] Thanks to Chris Baker for a preview of the translation of *Yuan Phai*: Baker and Pasuk 2017b: 17.
[44] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 248–9; cf. Tambiah 1976: 96.
[45] Wyatt 1982: 10; Forest 1998, I: 152.
[46] See *UP* 205 for the ethicisation of cosmic kingship across the Indic and East Asian worlds.
[47] *RCA* 309. This logic is elaborated in the *Long Song Prophecy* for Ayutthaya: see Cushman and Wyatt 2001, verses 7, 8, 10.
[48] Gokhale 1966: 22.

texts also strive to close that breach in certain ways. The Buddha is compared with the *cakkavatti* at several places and is reported as having been one in a previous lifetime; they both share the thirty-two bodily signs of the great man.[49] There was then a close equation between the status of a *cakkavatti* and that of a bodhisattva. (In the Theravada tradition a bodhisattva was a buddha-to-be.)[50]

Bodhisattvas were, by definition, overflowing with merit, and the doctrine of merit was a most important mechanism by which a more immanentist and empirical apprehension of kingship became possible in Buddhist terms. Only a being with a vast accumulation of merit would be reborn as a king in the first place. Thus, the Palace Chronicle of Ayutthaya announces that Narai had acceded to the throne, that is, gained victory over his adversary, 'with the holy power of His constant condition of accumulated merit'.[51] As this indicates, while royal blood mattered in Thai royal succession, it could be trumped by charismatic displays of merit – in which acclamation followed usurpation.[52] While the principle of merit wrote an element of ethicised contractualism into the status of the king, it also followed faithfully where the dirty stuff of politics led. It translated raw charisma into ideology in a very immediate way that threatened to trump its routinised forms. La Loubère grasped that in this sense merit was genuinely analogous to the Chinese Mandate of Heaven – and, we may add, to Hawaiian *mana*, or even Christian Providence.[53]

The doctrine of merit not only reflected but surely drove the tumult of succession crises, and it meant that even kings in situ could not rest on their laurels, however much karmic progress they made by building new temples or conducting elaborate Buddhist rites. Theravada Buddhism had not ultimately provided a means of condensing all access to either immanent power or transcendentalist authority in the person of the king: Rivals could tap into these resources through special ascetic practices or the demonstration of prowess.[54] The logic of merit provided a cultural underpinning to the operation of the 'galactic' or 'solar' form of polity, in which subordinates in peripheral bases routinely make a bid for centrality.

[49] Tambiah 1976: 41–4, 96; Skilling 2007: 193; Gyallay-Pap 2007: 78.
[50] Tambiah 1976: 39; Skilling 2007: 189; *RCA* 233. [51] *RCA* 232.
[52] Loubère 238; compare Tachard 385. Also Gesick 1983: 88, 97; Kemp 1969: 44; Forest 1998, I: 152; Reynolds 2006: 162.
[53] Loubère 356. [54] Gesick 1983: 88; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 210.

The Brahmanised King: Humanity Concealed and Divinity Staged

The king is truly absolute. He is properly the god of the Siamese. No one dares speak his name.

Abbé de Choisy[55]

However, all Theravada kingdoms have supplemented the Buddhist tradition with a Brahmanic courtly culture that divinised the king in a more explicit and unqualified manner. In certain South Asian contexts, Brahmins could take on a position of transcendent superiority vis-à-vis the king. But this possibility was essentially excised out of the Sanskrit cultural package as it was developed by Theravada courts, who of course reserved that status for the sangha.[56] Subordinated to Buddhist paramountcy, Brahmins were accorded an important but limited role in maintaining certain ritual, astrological and administrative technologies of state. They were required to communicate with the gods of the Indic pantheon and construct a series of parallels between the earthly and heavenly domains: a crucial but essentially immanentist enterprise.[57] Thus were they converted. For example, a eulogy to Narai by one of his Brahmins is almost entirely conducted within the standard terms of Indic language and mythology, beginning with a homage to Śiva and ending with prayers beseeching many specific gods to enhance the resplendent power of Narai – and yet there are also clues testifying to an unproblematic acknowledgement of the Buddhist framework.[58]

From the start, Ayutthaya was probably distinguished from other early Thai kingdoms by its adoption of elements of Khmer rulership and recruitment of Khmerised elites.[59] Narai claimed descent from the kings of Angkor, and they had been associated with deities in intimate ways, with their inscriptions containing allusions to the possession of a 'subtle inner self' that was understood as being a 'portion' of the god

[55] Choisy 1995: 304. [56] See Tambiah 1976: 83; Skilling 2007: 201.
[57] On the role of Brahmins: *PL* 10–11, 70–2.
[58] Dhiravat 2015: 66. Compare the Eulogy to Prasat Thong (Baker and Pasuk 2020).
[59] Wyatt 2001a: 60–1; Ishii 1986: 151–2; Charnvit 1976: 135 (note fn. 40); Kemp 1969: 33. Brahmanic influence did not necessarily come from Angkor directly: Skilling 2007: 199.

Śiva.[60] This finds a distinct echo in the ritual of coronation or consecration (*abhiṣeka*) undergone by the kings of Ayutthaya. In describing the anointment of Narai at the hands of his Brahmins in October 1656, the Ayutthaya chronicle refers to a long list of titles including 'Manifestation of the Eleven Dreaded ones'.[61] The name of Narai's predecessor but one, King Ekathotsarot (r. 1605–1610/1611), is also a reference to these beings, who were in fact the Hindu trinity and the eight guardians of the cardinal and subcardinal directions.[62] The king is indeed not just created by these principal gods of the Indic pantheon but is somehow a manifestation of them all or, at least, a receptacle for their power. This is clearly what the act of consecration, and perhaps subsequent bathing ceremonies in the ritual year, achieved.[63] Narai took his name from Viṣṇu, after relatives thought they had seen four arms at his birth. A legend sprang up around him, probably within his lifetime, that he had revealed his nature as an avatar of Viṣṇu through using his four arms to escape a palace fire caused by lightning.[64] The Brahmanic eulogy to Narai announced that:

> It is a wonder that the deity supreme above all others who resides above the ocean of pure milk, Four-armed Lord Vishnu, has descended to be born on earth as the King [Narai], who has so much might and glory, more than any king since antiquity.[65]

If this represents a foundational feature of Ayutthayan kingship, some of the traditions that seemed hallowed by Narai's time appear to have been the deliberate creations of his immediate predecessor Prasat Thong (r. 1629–1656), a usurper driven by a keenly felt legitimacy

[60] Loubère 348; Dhiravat and Smithies 2011: 200. See Kulke 1993: 362–75, and Strathern 2019a for a discussion of the *devarāja* idea.

[61] *RCA* 232. [62] Baker and Pasuk 2017b: 17, fn. 10, and see 16.

[63] See also *PL* 70–2, 77 (on the use of the term *thep manut*, 'divine-human'), 115; Nidhi 2005: 22, using the *Yuan Phai* (Baker and Pasuk 2017b): 'Offerings to the gods and the king can be considered identical because the king is an avatar (incarnation) of a god.'

[64] Compare the *Yodaya Yazawin* (Tun Aung Chain 2005: 49) with Gervaise 243–4. Also Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 228; Dhiravat 1984: 267.

[65] Dhiravat 2015: 83. See also Nidhi 2005: 22, on the *Anirut Khamchan*, which begins with a passage about an avatar of 'Phra Narai' (i.e., Viṣṇu) coming to rule Ayutthaya. In the *Long Song of Prophecy*, Narai is 'the refuge of humans in the world / the refuge of the gods in every astrological house' (Chris Baker, p.c., a more literal translation than Cushman and Wyatt 2001: 5).

deficit.[66] His response was to move kingship consistently towards the divinised model, consciously drawing on the Khmer inheritance to do so. In 1630–1631 Prasat Thong sent men to Angkor to bring back plans as the basis for his own architectural projects.[67]

The result was the elaborate ritualisation and concealment of the king's body and an overmastering anxiety about the need to control the magical forces that might threaten him.[68] Prasat Thong's paranoiac sense of insecurity, which also issued in brutal purges of *khunnang* (court officials), was surely at work here.[69] Baker has also alluded to a more structural development, the progressive removal of the king's presence from the battlefield.[70] This tallies with the theoretical argument about the shift from heroic to cosmic kingship.[71] It was the diminished opportunity to establish raw charisma in war that fuelled such recourse to its routinised ritual elaboration.

Prasat Thong pushed the principle of royal distance from normal human interaction as far as it could go: The king and queen's appearances to both the people and the elite were heavily restricted and, when they did occur, were heavily stage managed; courtiers were subject to extreme physical abasement in his presence; the palace was walled into an expanded and forbidding edifice, the gates almost always shut; royal titles became extremely complex and formal; the Khmer-based special language of the palace may have been instituted in his reign; close relatives were identified as the most suitable marriage partners; the king's name became forbidden knowledge.[72] Naturally, Prasat Thong's Brahmins were central to this and worked to increase his identification with Indra, lord of the gods – a major means by which the cosmic divinisation of the king was effected.[73] The astrological advice of the Brahmins gripped him obsessively as the year 1000 of the Chulasakkarat calendar approached in 1639, signalling the end of a period of decline (*Kaliyuga*) and a cataclysmic end to all things. His frenetic attempt to divert it culminated in a great ritual enactment in

[66] Compare Taksin, in Strathern 2019a. Note Smith 2019: 168–70, who sees the reign of Ekathotsarot (r. 1605–1610) as providing a kind of blueprint for the more Buddhist elements of the performance of kingship.
[67] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 145; Fouser 1996: 31, 96–7. [68] *PL* 60, 97.
[69] Kemp 1969: 4; Dhiravat 1984: 158; Van der Cruysse 2002: 75.
[70] Baker 2013: 80–1. [71] *UP* 164–70.
[72] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 143–7; Loubère 345. On royal name taboos elsewhere, see Duindam 2016: 187.
[73] Baker and Pasuk 2017a :146; Woraporn 2007.

which he took the part of Indra and adjusted the calendar.[74] This event is celebrated in a long eulogy that represents the first in the genre of royal praise-poems.[75]

In essence, Narai lived out the system of ritual concealment that Prasat Thong had perfected, as the French reports from the 1680s by the likes of La Loubère and Guy Tachard testify. According to Nicolas Gervaise,

> There has never been any court anywhere in the world more mysterious [*mysterieuse*] than that of the king of Siam. One does not walk, speak, drink, or eat or cook without ceremony … Everything that is destined for use by His Majesty is considered sacred and is so much venerated that it is removed out of sight of people and even to point at it is forbidden on pain of suffering the mutilation of the offending finger … [he goes on to describe a class of officials who carry things to the palace. These must in turn hand items to the king's] pages, who must give them to him in a great golden bowl on the end of a long handle, which they have to hold while remaining prostrate on the ground until he has taken it in his hands.[76]

Gervaise proceeds to describe the elaborate procedures surrounding the king's mealtimes, in which he 'eats with his head down and alone'.[77] Even his conversation could not be of the mortal variety, for it had to be conducted in a special language known only to the nobles who were close to the king.[78] An element of diarchy had sprung up to cope with the consequences: The palace itself was divided into Front and Rear sections, each with its own set of officials – the Front dealing with more public and military matters, the Rear with more domestic ones.[79]

Queens, meanwhile, were hidden from the sight of all but palace women and eunuchs.[80] Royal marriages took on an incestuous quality: Narai, for example, married his paternal half-sister, and when she died

[74] Dhiravat 1984: 198–9; Van Vliet in Baker et al. 2005: 20, 56–7, 157; Woraporn 2007: 149–50. See Strathern 2019a: 60 for the claim that he had recourse to human sacrifice.

[75] Baker and Pasuk 2020: This poem magnified his righteous and divinised qualities in various ways, claiming that Prasat Thong was a bodhisattva, 'the tenth and last of a sequence begun with Metteya'.

[76] Gervaise 299–300.

[77] Gervaise 301–2. *RCA* 301 records that the royal page Phra Pi (see below) was allowed to break some of these food taboos.

[78] Tachard 1689: 214.

[79] Compare Duindam 2016: 168–88.

[80] Loubère 345–7; Kemp 1969: 28; *PL* 74.

in 1685 he seems to have raised his daughter Kromluang Yothathep to the status of a queen.[81]

On those occasions where the king did hold audience, a strict form of prostration was insisted upon, in which one inched forward painfully on all fours, heads down, hands joined at the forehead, in total silence.[82] Even in councils four hours long, the ministers lay prostrate and reverent throughout.[83] At all times the king had to be placed physically higher than anyone else.[84] On occasions such as the receptions of ambassadors, the king appeared at a high window, looking out onto his audience below. But the window was curtained, and it was only after a loud blast on the trumpets warning the court to lower their heads that the curtains were whisked open.[85] Highly formal and scripted dialogue inevitably followed.

Gervaise is again difficult to resist on the logic behind this extraordinary etiquette: to destroy the idea that he was, after all, just a man.

> The kings who have ruled it up to the present are accorded honours that would seem to be due only to God … if they are given to appear rarely in public, this is perhaps because they are apprehensive of their Peoples coming to realise that the majority of kings are made, often enough, like other men and have imperfections and weaknesses as they do … The freedom which everyone in Europe has to discuss the Prince and his conduct is viewed in Siam as a crime against the State. For this reason the king's name is never revealed to the People during his lifetime.[86]

European witnesses repeatedly interpreted all this as equivalent to revering the king as a deity.[87] The French arrived as emissaries from the most elaborate of European court cultures, glamorising their own 'Sun-king'.[88] And yet evidently the drama of divinisation surrounding Narai was perceived to be on an utterly different level. The Siamese

[81] Gervaise 249–51. See Bhawan 2006; Dhiravat 1984: 48, on Kromluang Yothathep.
[82] On silence: *PL* 61, 94–5.
[83] Tachard 375: 'The respect they have for the King goes as far as adoration.'
[84] Forbin 1991: 33.
[85] Gervaise 303; Loubère 340–2; Kemp 1969: 10–11; Céberet 1992: 108. Dhiravat 1984: 23 refers to Dutch evidence.
[86] Gervaise 77–8.
[87] Joost Schouten 1636 in Smithies 1995: 19; Van Vliet in Baker et al. 2005: 112: The king 'is worshipped and honoured by his subjects more than a god'. Compare Bourges 1666: 159; Gervaise 289.
[88] Love 1999: 12; Asch 2014: 112–13.

ambassadors were no less perplexed at Versailles in November 1684 to see the courtiers jostling around the person of Louis XIV as they were led towards him.[89]

Ibrahim Muhammad Rabi's account of the Persian embassy of 1686 is extremely valuable here in providing insight independent of the cumulative tradition of European reportage.[90] It is particularly intriguing given that the envoys came from a Safavid court widely noted for the extent to which rulers were revered by their subjects. Having long drawn upon Sufi and Iranian traditions of royal divinisation, under Shah Suleiman they were also becoming more inaccessible and palace-bound than ever.[91] Yet the ambassadors' reactions are telling:

> The Siamese consider the king's throne room the most sacred edifice there is … when we arrived the Siamese officials and translators who were accompanying us all prostrated themselves, as if they were worshipping God, the one true King. We were still a good distance from the door but they had already caught a glimpse of the throne so they fell to the ground … This huge mass of people, face down on the mats and rugs, looked like a large congregation of Muslims saying their prayers. They were arranged row after row like a collection of dead bodies and not a single person moved or showed the least sign of life.[92]

These and other elements of court ritual are criticised for their brazen usurpation of divinity on the part of a man.[93]

Palace meetings with courtiers, officials and ambassadors could not be avoided, but the common people? They were denied all vison of their sovereign except in a radically reduced number of highly orchestrated spectacles. By the 1680s there were only one or two such occasions in the year.[94] There had previously been others, as La Loubère notes, including a ploughing ceremony to mark the start of the rice-growing season. This rite invoked a ubiquitous cosmic conception of the king as a guarantor of fertility, but already in the

[89] *Mémoires de Bénigne Vachet*, in Launay, ed. 1920, I: 142–3.
[90] The European texts show signs of awareness of earlier and other accounts.
[91] See *Ship* 53. The introductory doxology conveys the notion that, 'The sultan is the shadow of the Lord.' Also Matthee 2012: 14–16, 57–9, 197–9.
[92] *Ship* 62. Marcinkowski 2005: 36 notes that a similar form of proskynesis was used in the Safavid court.
[93] *Ship* 64, 96, 139. See Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007: 166–7.
[94] Loubère 221–2; Gervaise 293; Kemp 1969: 20. See Strathern 2019a.

Palace Law it was left to a king-for-the-day to perform.[95] In another ceremony of cosmic regulation, the 'speeding of the outflow' at the end of the monsoon period, the king rode out on a barge and struck the floodwaters with a long-handled fan in order to effect their withdrawal.[96] The flood was the very essence of natural power: necessary for the fertilisation of the soil but disastrous if uncontained and uncontrolled. But intriguingly, this ceremony was abandoned by Narai in 1676 (see below). Thus, in both cases, the public enactment of cosmic kingship in its concrete form was withdrawn.

That left the *kathin* ceremony in late October or early November as the one occasion for the people of Ayutthaya to be let into the theatre of state.[97] The *kathin* was an occasion for the laity to donate new robes to the sangha, marking the end of the rainy season retreat of the monks (when they retired for serious meditation for three months). But it was used by the kings as a great procession of state to visit the chief monk (*sangkharat*) and the principal temples, including Wat Pa Kaeo, in which the king could act as the almsgiver par excellence.[98] The principal journey was the *kathin nam*, in which beautiful, gilded barges – Tachard counted 159 – processed along the river.[99] It ended with a barge race back to the palace. No visitor failed to be impressed by the spectacle.[100] This was the occasion that the Abbé de Choisy famously claimed made him feel pity for

> this poor king, when I saw him in this pomp, passing before two hundred thousand people who lined the riverbanks, and who with hands joined and face pressed to the earth rendered him divine honours: how could a poor man accustomed to these adorations not imagine that he was above humanity; and how difficult it will be to persuade him to submit to all the humiliations of the Christian religion.[101]

Strict taboos against the direct gaze governed all other journeys the king took by land or water.[102] Such were the means by which a habitus of reverence was lodged deep into the instincts of the Siamese. There

[95] *PL* 118; Van Vliet in Baker et al. 2005: 48–9; Loubère 166–7.
[96] Early description in Couto 1778: 126–7.
[97] Gervaise 293; Loubère 221–2; Choisy 1995: 202.
[98] Van Vliet in Baker, et al. 2005: 119–20 on possible temples visited.
[99] Tachard 263; Smithies, ed. 1995: 15; Dhiravat 1984: 23–4; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 142; Forest 1998, I: 270.
[100] Choisy 1687: 243; Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 52–3.
[101] Choisy 1687: 244.
[102] Kemp 1969: 22–3; Loubère 222; Gervaise 292–3.

are a few clues, moreover, that the kings of Ayutthaya – merit-filled and lore-learned as they were – could be credited with magical powers: summoning divine winds, protecting ambassadors in far-away countries or reading peoples' minds.[103]

The King and the Sangha

The monks are 'the arbiters of the fate of kings'.[104]

And yet, such a being, about as exalted as mortal wit could devise, could not expect such etiquette from the monks.[105] If we compare the relationship between the monarchy and the sangha in Theravada societies with the state of affairs in Japan and East Asia more generally, two points of contrast present themselves. On the one hand, the sangha and what it stood for was much more profoundly woven into the conception of the state as its raison d'être. On the other hand, on an institutional level, the unified sangha was much more dominated by the sovereign, whose surveillance became necessary to its proper functioning.[106] Wherever this form of state–sangha relationship has become entrenched it has only been unfastened by the removal of monarchy per se.

The sangha was subject to a degree of hierarchical organisation, without attaining the organisational autonomy and integration of the Catholic Church.[107] It depended rather on the agency of the king, who appointed the *sangkharat* (sangha head) and had the obligation to reform the monkhood through conducting rigorous examinations and purges.[108] Thus, as Alain Forest has put it, 'in relation to the king the monk was superior but helpless', as exquisitely helpless as any monk standing with a begging bowl in front of a layman's house.[109] The superiority was no less real for all that. Given how much the ideology of sovereignty was conveyed and effected through physical

[103] Strathern 2019a: 67; *RCA* 172, 302; Visudh 2002: 38–40.
[104] Tessier 1734, cited in Forest 1998, III: 362. [105] See Forest 1998, III: 419–2.
[106] If the kingship was symbolically subsumed by Buddhism, Buddhism was institutionally subsumed under the king.
[107] Some contrast in sources: Loubère 371 versus Gervaise 184–6. Also: Dhiravat 1984: 92–3; Forest 1998, I: 140; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 202.
[108] Routine supervision and judicial authority was devolved to the *Okya phrasedet*: Gervaise 82; Tachard 223–4.
[109] See Forest 1998, III: 424 and p. 168 (this volume) footnote 13.

comportment, it is of the utmost significance that monks were exempt from the normal form of prostration before the king – and that Narai was forced to avoid encountering them rather than have to salute them like any other layman.[110] This is a graphic image through which to grasp the paradox set up by an elaboration of divinised kingship circumscribed by transcendentalism. The monk only yielded governmental regulation to the king in order to retain moral authority, and this authority could at certain moments be translated into political clout.[111] Forest goes as far as describing the monkhood as 'an unavoidable political "party" constituting a formidable vector for the propagation and formation of public opinion'.[112] Note two comments of La Loubère.

> However, sometimes, but very rarely, and in affairs of a certain nature, he will consult the principal sancrats, who are the superiors of the *talapoins* [monks], whose credit he otherwise diminishes as much as he can, though in appearance he honours them very much.[113]

And later:

> A Talapoin sins if he interferes with affairs of state . . . moreover I believe that a wise policy has done much to prohibit affairs of the State to these people who have so much power over the mind of the people.[114]

Thus, the delicacies of the relationship between 'church' and 'state'. The first comment alludes to the way that the king must defer to the monks while continuously stalling their ability to affect the political arena. The second comment – which would shortly appear highly ironic given the events of 1688 – indicates that such interdictions were necessary because the ideological sway of the monks over the people was so evident.

Siamese Absolutism and Extraversion

One explanation as to why the sacralisation of Ayutthaya kingship was so awesomely elaborated was because the exactions on the *phrai*

[110] Gervaise 190, 306, confirmed by Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 91. Also Choisy 1995: 197.

[111] Harris 2007: 3. Reid, ed. 1993: 263 ('The sangha could play a political role, as in the overthrow of Narai in 1688, but in no sense did it share in secular power'), and see for comparators, Reid, ed. 1993: 197, 282; Guedes 1994: 21; Grabowsky 2007: 134–5.

[112] Forest 1998, III: 413, 423–4. [113] Loubère 350. [114] Loubère 397–8.

(freemen) and the *khunnang* were so great that the question of legitimation was rendered exceptionally acute. The term used by many French observers and some scholars to describe the nature of royal authority in Narai's Siam is 'absolutism'.[115] This reflects how salient the concept was in French political life at the time, where it was commonly used – either with approval or anxiety – to describe the aspiration of Louis XIV to assert his untrammelled will over the government of his realm.[116] Lurking behind its application to Siam was also a developing discourse of 'oriental despotism', which naturally requires our caution.[117] And to some extent Europeans may have been bewitched by the awesome symbolic elevation of the king.[118] But they were also reflecting real political developments over the seventeenth century, as Ayutthaya waxed into the 'strong form' of the galactic polity, to use Stanley Tambiah's language.[119]

The crucial marker of this shift was that outlying centres were no longer held by hereditary princes but were subject to firm central control through the appointment of temporary governors.[120] This was a relatively natural process to European eyes. What they found more remarkable was that the Thai kings seemed to have prevented the development of any independent and hereditary aristocracy, one that might command its own sources of wealth, boast of its own prestigious bloodlines and impress its interests onto the functioning of the state. Instead, the elite – that is, the *khunnang* – were a form of service nobility, whose position was entirely derived from their office – hence their French designation as 'mandarins'. Offices could be removed as easily as they were bestowed and their holders subject to humiliating

[115] Reid, ed. 1993; Dhiravat 1990: 130. Ribadeneira 1970: 164 refers to the king of Ayutthaya as an 'absolute lord' in 1601.

[116] Rubiés 2005. Admiration for Siamese monarchical centralisation expressed by Bourges 1666: 157. In the harangue that the Abbé de Choisy (*Mémoire pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV* in 1995: 412) prepared for Narai, he referred to Louis XIV's decision to govern his kingdom alone, without a chief minister.

[117] Especially in Loubère (e.g., 320–5). See Strathern 2019a: 70; Forest 1998, I: 149–50; Bhawan 2007: 5; Reid, ed. 1993: 252; Reynolds 2006: 34.

[118] The *Ship of Suleiman* (*Ship* 100) contrasts with European interpretations here, perhaps because the divinisation of the king was less surprising and the lack of a standing army more striking to Persian eyes.

[119] Tambiah 1976; Lieberman 2003: 277–82; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 152–3.

[120] Gervaise 84; Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 104.

punishments.[121] Seventeenth-century kings had strained every sinew to prevent the families who regularly provided officials from accumulating too much wealth, claiming the right to seize ever larger portions of the property left behind by the deceased. Narai exercised complete discretion in this regard.[122] There was a real sense, then, in which all land and even property itself was in the gift of the king, who could take it away for transgressions.[123] Moreover, particularly under Narai, as we shall see, the king of Ayutthaya was an increasingly suffocating presence in the marketplace, always energetic as a merchant through the office of the Phrakhlang (which the Europeans called 'Barcalon', responsible for trade and foreign affairs and taxes) and prone to arbitrarily declaring certain trades as royal monopolies.[124]

The key to wealth in Siam lay in labour rather than land, and the most fundamental basis of royal power was control over the labour of freemen (*phrai*).[125] Most freemen were *phrai luang* who were obliged to give six months of their labour each year to the crown.[126] This was facilitated by one of the bureaucratic feats of the Ayutthayan kingdom, the maintenance of public registers of all males over the age of sixteen and their assignment to quartermasters (*nai*) of different levels. For half the year then, most men in the country were conscripted into the army or set to work on the construction of sacred buildings and the repair of fortifications and palaces. It is not surprising that Europeans either bemoaned or swooned before such royal powers that had no counterpart in their homelands.

For all that, European accounts rather underplay the power that elite families continued to wield. Without some sense of the threat that they represented, it is difficult to understand why the system should also have depended on brutal punishments and the mass executions of *khunnang* accompanying court purges.[127] These purges were a response to the constant intrigue in the court and the threat of

[121] Tachard 373; Gervaise 85. Loubère 303 is mistaken on this point. Kemp 1969: 48.
[122] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 154–6; Dhiravat 1984: 130; Reid, ed. 1993: 254–9.
[123] Gervaise 144; Loubère 239; Choisy 1995: 303.
[124] Dhiravat 1990: 130–1; Van der Cruysse 2002: 85–6.
[125] Gervaise 128, 144–5; Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 95–6, 104; Le Blanc 1692, I: 7.
[126] *Phrai som* had to give their labour to a high-ranking *khunnang*: Dhiravat 1984: 14, 63–71.
[127] Loubère 351–4; *Ship* 145; *PL* 61. Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 161; Forbin 1991: 43; Bhawan 2007: 11.

coup.[128] Undoubtedly the lack of any established principle of succession and the relative weakness of royal blood did much to fuel the intrigue.[129] The persisting vulnerability of the king was also a reflection of the one great limitation on his assertion of power: While the *khunnang* class could be squeezed out of access to trade, land and moveable wealth in various ways, the king still depended on them for the operation of the corvée system, and his high officials were also little centres of manpower and patronage themselves.[130] Indeed the ties of patronage remained the most compelling forms of loyalty in this setting. As David Wyatt puts it, 'Ayutthaya had not generated overarching loyalties to the monarch and state that could transcend the personal ties around which cliques and factions formed.'[131] In European states those 'overarching loyalties' could be found in the developing patriotisms that La Loubère explicitly perceived a lack of in Ayutthaya.[132]

It is ultimately difficult to avoid the logic that is presented in some European accounts: That, in effect, the solutions designed to protect the king from his nobles also exacerbated his insecurity in the long-term and that these solutions risked diminishing the capacity for the wider elite to feel that they had a stake in the enterprise of the state.[133] The more the *khunnang* depended on the king's favour for their wealth and status and even their security, the more they might risk all to ensure that it turned their way. At times it seems as if the Ayutthaya kings were in a state of war with their own officials, and there is no more vivid symbol of that than the extraordinary degree to which they explicitly favoured foreigners, especially in areas that touched most intimately on the king's security and advantage, the conduct of trade and the protection of his person.

By the 1680s, if not long before, Ayutthaya had become cosmopolitan to an extent that easily set it apart from regional rivals.[134] There were several structural reasons behind its extravagant 'extraversion'.

[128] *PL* 60, 96. [129] Loubère 347–8; Dhiravat 1984: 105–7, 132.
[130] Lieberman 2003: 282. See the edict in the Palace Law (*PL* 101) on the dangers of lesser lords coming to the capital and wooing *phrai* away.
[131] Wyatt 2001a: 84–5.
[132] Loubère 356. However, the events of 1688 would indicate that he was not entirely correct in his intuition.
[133] Loubère 356; compare analysis in Reid, ed. 1993: 262.
[134] Lieberman 2003: 292, 321

The first derived from the significance of manpower over territory, which meant that a ruler could advertise the extent of his sovereignty by displaying the diversity of peoples gathered under its umbrella.[135] The *cakkavatti* was a universal monarch, an emperor glorying in – as opposed to merely tolerating – the inclusion of foreigners and various vassal kingdoms.[136]

The second reason was alluded to above: The strategies adopted to staunch the inherent fissiparousness of the state entrenched a fundamental lack of trust between the ruler and his most powerful officials. This encouraged the deployment of foreigners who had no control over local manpower.[137] The third reason reflects the way in which the seas brimmed with both opportunity and threat in the 'early modern' conjuncture of the seventeenth century. These brought, most crudely, new military specialists, skills and technologies. Narai came to the throne with the help of the Pattani Malays, Japanese and Persians.[138] The only standing army of the realm was his large personal bodyguard of foreign cavalrymen, infantryman and archers, which included specialist units of Lao, Moors, Chinese and Indians amongst others.[139] He had somehow persuaded the first Jesuit superior, Tomaso Valguarnera, to supervise the construction of the city walls and fortification in 1663.[140]

Above all, however, what the seas brought was trade, which the kings seized on as an arena of wealth creation that could be separated from the pyramidal organisation of labour. Thus, the Thai kings became enthusiastic and ruthless practitioners of mercantilism, using the coercive capacities of state power to claim as large a share of trade as possible. The pursuit of this strategy may have been strengthened by the Persian diaspora at Ayutthaya or observation of its application by

[135] Kemp 1969: 34–5.
[136] *RCA* 248–9; The *Long Song Prophecy*, Cushman and Wyatt 2001: 5–6.
[137] Le Blanc 1692, 1:17, 96; Desfarges 1691: 2; Loubère 54; Gervaise 85. European orientalist instincts may be suspect here, but the lack of trust is echoed in the Persian *Ship*, 59, and secondary scholarship has not demurred: Bhawan 2007: 122 (drawing on the work of Nidhi Eoseewong); Lieberman 2003: 291; Kitiarsa 2010: 62–3; Wyatt 2001a: 94–6.
[138] Bhawan 2007: 114; Dhiravat 1984: 255–64.
[139] Loubère 322, 337; Choisy 1995: 302–3.
[140] Tachard 275. Also: Loubère 322 on Charbonneau; Bhawan 2007: 142 for earlier parallels.

the Dutch.[141] But it was under Phaulkon that it was pushed to new heights as royal claims to monopolies mounted.[142] Traditionally, this dimension of the state had been devolved to the Phrakhlang, whom Europeans were liable to consider a sort of prime minister because his functions covered the conduct of state trade and foreign affairs.[143] Phaulkon diplomatically declined this role when it was offered to him in 1684 (remaining the *Samuha Nayok*) but only to pull all the strings behind the scenes. His strategy entailed a particular reliance on foreign talent; indeed, it turned an arm of the Siamese state into a mixed Asian–European mercantilist venture. It included what was in effect a small navy of junks and of European-style ships run by English, French and Portuguese privateers that was used to harass rivals and even ended up declaring war on Golconda and the English East India Company.[144]

While foreign adventurers were offered tantalising opportunities in Ayutthaya, the system also worked to contain their influence in various ways.[145] This is visible in their geographic location: Each foreign group was expected to reside in a distinct camp run by a chief who was answerable to the Phrakhlang, and this cluster of camps was placed outside the walls of the city proper.[146] The kings of the city played divide and rule among these groups too – a dangerous and tiring game but one that helped to prevent any one people becoming over-mighty. And those foreign favourites who were appointed to official positions were no more immune from sovereign caprice than the local *khunnang*. Phaulkon's demise was prefigured by that of Aqa Muhammad, the leader of the Persian community and minister. In 1679 he was accused of corruption and had his lips sewn together; he died shortly afterwards.

Indeed, the whole French experience in Siam was in several important respects either foreshadowed or echoed by that of the Persians, who set sail in 1685 intent on capitalising on their utility to the sovereign and the innate appeal of their culture. It is only that the

[141] Subrahmanyam 2005: 48–9, 76–7.
[142] Choisy, 'Mémoire sur le commerce des Indes orientales (1686)' in Choisy 1995: 405; *Ship* 110–11.
[143] Loubère 327.
[144] Gervaise 141–2; Bèze 1968: 20; Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 96–8; Tachard 365; Choisy 1995: 220, 243; Dhiravat 1984: 69–70; Forest 1998, I: 99.
[145] Emphasised by Forest 1998, I: 84–8. [146] Gervaise 85–6.

Muslim attempt to convert Narai was belated, arriving at a time when the dynamics of religious diplomacy had ceased to be propitious, while Christianity struck at the moment when French influence was at its height. But note: The results were the same.[147]

The Mission and Its Worldly Enticements

The French mission to convert Phra Narai sought to associate Christianity with the following means by which his worldly existence might be enhanced: (1) commercial and military advantages; (2) the achievements of European science, particularly astronomy; (3) the supernatural assistance afforded by Christian commitment; (4) the obedience of his subjects; and (5) the prestige of French culture and the royal magnificence of Louis XIV. Rather than tell the story of the Catholic Mission in chronological fashion, each will be considered in turn. It will be noticed that the first corresponds to *religious diplomacy*; the second was in fact most relevant as a function of *immanent power*, as more obviously was the third, while the fourth pertained to *enhancing authority*.

As for the fifth, its role will have to be explored elsewhere.[148] In summary, let us note that the glamour of French material culture and royal imagery was a very significant driver of Narai's continuing desire for diplomacy with France without ever amounting to an argument for conversion. Indeed, more generally there is little sense of a wider reverence for French culture. The more perspicacious observers of Siamese society came to realise that missionary work would have to be accommodative; for La Loubère and Phaulkon only a radical application of the Roberto de Nobili method had a chance of succeeding.[149] Thus, Siam was in effect placed alongside those Asian high cultures – Brahmanic India, Confucian China, Buddhist Japan – where indigenous standards of civility and esteem for their religious specialists compelled missionaries to themselves adapt rather than assume the appeal of the cultural baggage they brought with them.[150]

[147] *Ship*. This failed Islamisation also soured into violence, even if the Makassarese plot of 1686 is not firmly connected to the Persians: Launay, ed. 1920: 193–5; Gervaise 70–1; Le Blanc 1692, I: 42–3; Forbin 1991: 69–93.

[148] See Strathern 2019b: 31–4.

[149] Loubère 418–22; Tachard 282–3.

[150] Earlier, Franciscans had placed Siam alongside China and Japan in terms of its civilisational attainment (Pascal 2016: 15–16).

Buddhist Benignancy and Religious Diplomacy up to 1685

But generally speaking, the trading kings make strong use of the pretext of religion, for the increase of their commerce.

Simon de La Loubère[151]

La Loubère's observation is an orientalist generalisation – but a pertinent one. What did Narai mean by his dealings with the European missionaries up to 1685? In many ways, his approach simply followed the general acceptance of religious pluralism maintained by the kings of Ayutthaya and Siamese society more generally. Europeans habitually remarked on the freedom allowed to all the residents of the land to follow their traditional religions or embrace new ones.[152] Their surprise partly reflects the fact that by this time some ruling elites in other parts of non-Abrahamic Asia had already been irritated into a reaction against Christianity. It was presumably also informed by their experience of the European wars of religion and the endless crises resulting from the proliferation of sectarian difference.[153]

We may describe Narai's approach as an exercise in 'religious diplomacy' as long as this is not assumed to entail much insincerity on his part. Patronising the religious foundations of the various peoples under his sceptre was simply part of what being a good king was and a natural means of attracting foreign bodies and affections.[154] Nor was the court unused to seeing clerics as conduits of diplomacy given that Buddhist monks were used for the same purpose.[155]

Most significantly, Narai's 'policy' may be seen as merely an extension of the general Buddhist assumption that other religions did not, by their very existence, pose some kind of existential threat. That is because soteriological progress was not achieved through an allegiance to a jealous metaperson but by the cultivation of certain personal qualities and dispositions. Any tradition that facilitated such forms of self-discipline would have some soteriological merit. Hence Christianity's desiderata of selflessness, compassion, charity, or its

[151] Loubère 365. [152] Gervaise 229; Tachard 365.
[153] In 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes: Van der Cruysse and Smithies 2002: 146.
[154] Earlier Thai royal religious diplomacy with the Portuguese: Flores 1995: 116–22. Note Jacq-Hergoualc'h 1993: 43.
[155] Forest 1998, III: 373.

disparagement of worldly attainments, could find approval. But it also followed that Christianity was neither necessary for salvific advancement nor the most effective means of attaining it – because it did not, after all, place these values within a proper comprehension of reality (*dhamma*).

This is what lies behind the common European report to the effect that the Siamese believed that heaven is like a palace to which all paths lead.[156] Europeans saw this as a kind of indifference and struggled profoundly with how it could be linked with the other salient feature of the Siamese response to Christianity: their total failure to be attracted to it. Dealing with Buddhists here was like dealing with rubber: apparently yielding but ultimately intransigent. Their very gentleness protected them.[157] This is why earlier missionary accounts fluctuated between two apparently contradictory explanations: that the Siamese were either extremely attached to their superstitions, or they lacked religiosity.[158] Van Vliet, for example, remarked on how quietly the priestly orders lived, how they 'behave very moderately, even against the Christian and Mahomedan religions, without blaming anybody's opinion, and even less do they try to force anybody's conscience'. The priests asserted that 'one can come into heaven in various religions and that many religions are agreeable to the Supreme Masters. However, their own religion is the best of all, of which they are firmly convinced by laws and books.' As a result, neither the Portuguese nor Muslims, however fervent in their evangelism, had had much success in converting the Siamese.[159] So much for European commentators skidding around the surface of Indic religious identity.[160]

The Jesuits opened a new residence in Ayutthaya in 1656, the year Narai came to the throne.[161] The year 1662 saw the arrival of the first priest of the newly founded *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris*

[156] Bourges 1666: 166; cf. Forest 1998, III: 389.

[157] Choisy 1995: 221 on gentleness. But despair at the 'extraordinary inflexibility of the Siamese' could drive unflattering characterisations: *L'Etat present de l'Eglise*... p. 114; Le Blanc 1692, 1: 10–11.

[158] Smith 2011: 139–40.

[159] Van Vliet in Baker et al. 2005: 160; Bourges 1666: 167, 183; Joost Schouten in Smithies, ed. 1995: 21. Marcelo de Ribadineira (1601: 166), reflecting Franciscan experiences: The Siamese 'understand that their law is the best in the world and they would never voluntarily give it up for another.'

[160] See pp. 221–5 below.

[161] Van der Cruysse 2002: 118–19.

(MEP), Pierre Lambert de la Motte, the apostolic Bishop of Berythus, and he was followed in January 1664 by François Pallu, Bishop of Heliopolis.[162] They seem to have first piqued the king's interest in 1665 through their offer to educate ten of his subjects in their mission house and to found a college of the 'sciences of Europe'.[163] Narai's response included the gift of some land close to the Cochinchinese quarter and materials with which to construct a chapel and lodgings, the beginnings of a French camp.[164] His curiosity was subsequently aroused in 1667 by a book of engravings that the priests had given him in which images of Christian figures were paired with blank pages. This elicited the desired result: a request for the pages to be filled with explanatory text, which was carried out by a third MEP missionary, Louis Laneau, who was already learning Siamese. Narai then gave this book to some leading 'doctors of the court', surely monks, who reported to him that judging by the book 'the Christian religion was good, that it taught very noble things, and yet that which the king follows is also good'.[165] This was, of course, a typical expression of the Buddhist sensibility described above; the missionaries saw something else.

Even at this early stage, the French missionaries knew that they could float their ambitions on a lake of mutual material advantage. In October 1667, Lambert had written to Pallu that,

> One can see the first signs of grace in the heart of this king . . . having learned of the great plans that our own generous monarch has for establishing commerce in the Indies, it seems to me that, this city being a very advantageous place for that purpose, we could insinuate to the king to send an ambassador to this court, to follow the example of the successful Dutch, with the goal of negotiating the commerce one could conduct in this kingdom; and by this same means, His Most Christian Majesty could convince this monarch to embrace our religion as being very holy and the most appropriate for reigning princes.[166]

Lambert's optimism was immediately dashed by the outcome of the attempt to cure the half-brother of Narai, which is discussed below, and which resulted in some six years of silence from the palace. But

[162] This opened a saga of bad blood with the Jesuits, which long endured but is not relayed here.
[163] Mission Journal, 29 May 1665, Launay, ed. 1920: 16.
[164] Launay, ed. 1920: 15–17; Jacq-Hergoualc'h 1993: 45–8; Forest 1998, I: 185.
[165] Lambert to Pallu, October 1667, Launay, ed. 1920: 19.
[166] Lambert to Pallu, 19 October 1667, Launay, ed. 1920: 103.

when contact was re-established in October 1673, it was on exactly the diplomatic grounds Lambert had envisaged. If Narai condescended at this point to grant the MEP bishops a grand reception in Ayutthaya and a less formal encounter in Lopburi, it was because they were in effect ambassadors from the pope and Louis XIV. They were the bearers of bona fide letters from those individuals, and in Siam letters were treated as true emanations of the royal presence. This was a first royal missive from France, and its main purpose was to recommend the mission. Narai grasped the point: that favouring these priests was a sure route to French friendship. Narai offered his counterpart a port, a gesture that placed a little seed of colonial greed in the French mind.[167] But he did something else too, which encouraged the missionaries.

This was the period of the *kathin nam* ceremony, but this year as the king sped down the Chao Phraya in his golden royal barge, he commanded his oarsmen to change tack and to visit the French house.[168] There he decided that they needed more space and granted them an additional plot of land along with the promise to fund the construction of a church there. Given that this was, as noted above, the most prestigious occasion for the bestowal of gifts on the sangha and the only remaining public outing for the king in the year, this gesture was indeed remarkable. Arguably, it takes us beyond the simple practice of Buddhist benignancy.[169]

By 1676, Narai had conceived the plan of dispatching an embassy to Paris, and it finally set sail at the very end of 1680, only to disappear in a shipwreck around a year later.[170] There has been some scholarly debate about the extent to which Narai's overtures were motivated by a desire to seek out the French as a counterweight to the Dutch.[171] The French sources, at least, are adamant that the more aggressive Dutch actions in the region – particularly against Bantam – had assisted the French cause.[172] In July 1682, Pallu arrived with presents from the

[167] Van der Cruysse 2002: 180.
[168] *Relation des Missions . . . années 1672 . . .* 1680: 127, 131; and Lambert to the Directors of the Seminary, 3 December 1673, in Launay, ed. 1920: 51–2.
[169] See below pp. 207–10 on Narai's relationship with the sangha.
[170] Van der Cruysse 2002: 187, 211–17.
[171] Dhiravat 1984: 310, 347, 384, 396–7; Bhawan 2007: 139 are sceptical; Van der Cruysse 2002: 224; Love 1999: 19 to the contrary.
[172] Gervaise 73–4; Choisy 1995: 185 and 390 ('A bord de l'*Oiseau*, le 1er Janvier 1686'), 398–9 ('Mémoire sur le commerce. . .'); Céberet 1992: 49, 55, 112.

pope and Louis XIV, and Narai rewarded him with permission to build a church in Lopburi.[173] In September 1683 Narai learned of the disaster of his first embassy and quickly decided to send a second expedition to France with two of his officials accompanied by two MEP priests.

In January 1684 the party set off, called in on Charles II at Windsor castle en route, and arrived in France to be greeted by great crowds of the curious. In an audience with the Marquis of Seignelay at Versailles, the ambassadors were informed that it was 'the unity of religion which would provide an indissoluble link' between the two crowns.[174] In other words, the French ministers already considered Narai's conversion as an achievable diplomatic aim. What lay behind this, as Dirk Van der Cruysse has argued, was the first move by Phaulkon in the game of religious diplomacy.[175] He had suggested to one of the accompanying missionaries, Bénigne Vachet, that the king was all set to do something marvellous on the return of the embassy.[176] At Versailles, Vachet could also point to all the marks of Narai's favour to the Church.

The ambassadors themselves did nothing to confirm this understanding, but the prospect of the conversion of an oriental potentate was particularly pleasing to the king's Jesuit confessor François de La Chaise and to his mistress Françoise d'Aubigné.[177] Thus it was that when Louis XIV decided to send a return embassy, it was with the conversion of Narai as its principal objective.[178] The Chevalier de Chaumont, a recent convert from Protestantism, was appointed as ambassador, to be assisted in matters theological by the Abbé François-Timoléon de Choisy, a recent convert from frivolity.[179] Six Jesuits, including Guy Tachard, accompanied them. In the formal discourse of Chaumont's embassy when it arrived in Ayutthaya – his 'harangue' delivered in the palace on 18 October 1685 – we find another explicit articulation of the idea that conversion should be seen

[173] Van der Cruysse 2002: 231. Smith 2011: 150–2 suggests that 'Narai saw his role at the head of the Christian church in Siam'.
[174] Van der Cruysse 2002: 249.
[175] Phaulkon had used an equivalent strategy in his personal life, converting to Catholicism in order to obtain advantageous marriage to Maria Guyomar de Pinha.
[176] Launay, ed. 1920, I: 155; Van der Cruysse and Smithies 2002: 250–1.
[177] Terwiel 1999: xx. [178] Van der Cruysse and Smithies 2002: 261, 266, 288
[179] Van der Cruysse and Smithies 2002: 244–6.

as a form of supercharged alliance, as something that 'would cement forever the esteem and friendship between the two Kings'.[180]

Throughout all the twists and turns of events in the 1680s, the diplomacy of this period was shaped by Narai's realisation that the missionary conceits of the French had to be suffered in order to maintain good relations. The French meanwhile attempted to use Narai's desire for contact as the means to effect both his conversion and the realisation of commercial and increasingly colonial ambitions. But there was one structural feature of the diplomatic field that rendered their first objective extremely vain. What allowed the cosmopolitan strategy of Ayutthaya royalty to flourish was their skill in keeping all avenues to foreign strength open. At no point was an exclusive attachment to any one foreign power desirable. Ayutthaya kept its status as tribute payer to China. In the 1680s Narai was also sending embassies to Persia, Portugal, Goa, Rome and Batavia. To adopt the religion of one or two of these European powers would be to needlessly antagonise other potential allies. The disunity of Europe and its constant wars was something of which the Siamese court was all too aware.[181] The 'indissoluble link' that the French held out as an attraction might in fact be an uncomfortable chain. Yet the fundamental reasons why the strategy was doomed to fail had nothing to do with diplomacy at all.[182]

Matters Empirical: The Mastery of Time and Space

Otherwise in bitter conflict over the conduct of the embassy, Simon de La Loubère and Phaulkon agreed that the most propitious arena of evangelism was in fact that of technological and scientific achievement.[183] Not without reason: It was the MEP bishops' idea of the college of science that had first drawn the king's notice in the 1660s.[184] The king's interest in European clocks, globes, binoculars and telescopes was long-standing.[185] La Loubère was convinced,

> that the true secret of insinuating into the mind of these peoples, supposing that one has not the gift of miracles, is not to contradict anything directly,

[180] Choisy 1995: 208; Tachard 234–6; Gervaise 238. [181] Bhawan 2007: 124.
[182] See Chapter 6.
[183] It was Phaulkon's suggestion that led to dispatch of the six Jesuits in 1685.
[184] See above.
[185] Riello 2017: 260–1; Bhawan 2007: 146–7; Jacq-Hergoualc'h 1993: 80–1.

but to make them see, while unaware of it, their errors in the sciences, and especially in mathematics and anatomy.[186]

This is, in effect, a strategy of epistemological disconfirmation – but, since divine power is so unreliably immanent (i.e., absent 'the gift of miracles'), one must instead rely on science. But disconfirmation of what? This strategy assumed that Siamese knowledge was a tightly holistic system, such that a demonstration of the superiority of Western techniques in the fields of astronomy or medicine, for example, would somehow undermine the entire religious and philosophical edifice. In this, the French were mistaken, as we shall see, but they were at least right to imagine that the equivalent arenas of Siamese knowledge were bound up with ritual practices and religious understandings. Indeed, we now find ourselves on the shared ground between immanentism, magic and science, insofar as they are all open to empirical assessment.

It was particularly on astronomy that the mission placed their hopes. Arriving in Lopburi in November 1685, the Jesuits began setting up their instruments and taking measurements. On the night of 11 December at the king's hunting-lodge, they invited him to observe the eclipse of the moon that they had predicted would take place. Tachard reports on the king's satisfaction at the telescope and his pertinent questions.[187] He showed his pleasure in the usual manner by bestowing gifts but also in an unusual way: through the relative informality and intimacy of the whole encounter, which was considered 'a very rare thing'. In 1687, thirteen Jesuit mathematicians arrived, and on 16 April 1688, they observed a lunar eclipse from their residence, while the king did the same in his palace in Lopburi, sending questions to the fathers via a go-between.[188]

What might all this have meant to Narai? The Jesuits were stepping onto a clearly demarcated field of knowledge: the astrological expertise in the hands of the Brahmins. Narai had a Brahmin present at the first viewing in 1685 in Thale Chupson and again in his palace for the 1688 eclipse. Indeed this Brahmin – presumably the chief astrologer of the Front Palace, or *Phra Horathibodhi* who dealt with military and political affairs – made it his business to investigate the telescopes

[186] Loubère 421.
[187] Tachard 328–9; Choisy 1995: 276–7; Chaumont 1733: 71–2.
[188] Le Blanc 1692: 81, and also Smithies 2003a.

independently.[189] There was an element of competition about this, for the Brahmin at Lopburi had predicted the eclipse to within a quarter of an hour, although he was mistaken as to its duration.[190] The Brahmin had engaged the Jesuits with a number of questions, comparing their answers with the Chinese theory at one point.

Indeed, the eclipse was already construed as a salient and worrying event in Siam: No wonder Narai wished to see what was going on up there.[191] For the Siamese – as across much of the world in this period – to understand the stars was to gain the kind of mastery over the course of events that it was crucial for a king to maintain. Above all, astrologers needed to calculate the auspicious moments in which to commence significant activities.[192] The wealth of new skills and machines brought by Europeans must have seemed to Narai and his Brahmins as an opportunity to improve their control over the hidden mechanisms of the universe.

Indeed, we know that in recent years Narai had commissioned the *phra horathibodhi* to write a new kind of historical text, the Luang Prasoet chronicle, in which a chronologically ordered progression of royal affairs was combined with astrological events and unusual happenings – perhaps an attempt to investigate empirically the patterns that astrology claimed to reveal.[193] It is unlikely to be a coincidence that in 1685, Narai also altered the official basis for his calendar, shifting it from the Chulasakkarat (the Lesser Era) to Phutthasakkarat (the Buddhist Era), so that 1685 CE, which had been 1046, became the year 2228 after the Buddha's attainment of *parinibbāna*.[194] Perhaps Narai favoured emphasising a calendrical system that simultaneously matched the principle on which the Christian system was based (anchored by the life of the founder) while also advertising Buddhism's greater antiquity.[195] But it may also represent the fact that the calculations around the Chulasakkarat had been shown to be imperfect by the Jesuit astronomers, necessitating a

[189] Choisy 1995: 271. On the position of the *Phra Horathibodhi*: *PL* 109–10.
[190] Tachard 334.
[191] Tachard 335; Smithies 2003a: 198, and see 190. On the ritual marking of eclipse: *PL* 110.
[192] See Loubère 264. [193] See Strathern 2019b and Hodges 1999.
[194] Loubère 261–3. Phaulkon's explanations for this are probably bluster (Gervaise 155; Dhiravat 1984: 396–7).
[195] Compare Tachard 309–10. Narai may also have been concerned about astrological inauspiciousness, in the manner of Prasat Thong (Strathern 2019a).

different framework. Innovation followed, in other words, but without challenging certain fundamental local premises.

The astronomical prowess of the Jesuits had certainly been effective in catching the king's attention and patronage. But it did little to undermine the status of the Brahmins, who engaged flexibly with them in a spirit of technical enquiry. The Buddhist monks, meanwhile, who had been invited to none of these viewings, were, unsurprisingly, not won over.[196] More importantly, this was not an area of knowledge that pertained to their core purpose or truth-claims; it was a realm of immanentist concern that had been contracted to Brahmanic specialists in the first place.

Many of the French sources already bear the hallmarks of the self-conscious confidence of the scientific revolution.[197] But their detachment of astronomy from astrology threatened to radically diminish the utility of stargazing, rendering academic what had been of vital political importance. The authority of astrology was not only verified by its accurate account of heavenly movements but also every time its predictions of earthly affairs appeared to come true. So empirical a business was this that the *Palace Law* set out punishments for astrologers making wrong predictions.[198] And the fact that astrology could be empirically verified through worldly events allowed it to slide underneath or to one side of all religious frameworks.[199] The French had in fact ceded the ground of immanentist competition in the sense that it mattered most: No wonder Brahmins remained in control of its deeper meanings.

Christian Magic

It was not just through science that French techniques could be conceived as in competition with local ritual or magical practice. The Christianity they brought had its own instrumentalist ritual claims, its own magic to offer.[200] If we examine the core arguments deployed in the ambassadorial attempts to convert Narai, we find the transcendentalist dimension decidedly muted. The court harangues

[196] Tachard 335; Gervaise 65: The Siamese sense of superiority rested on astrology.
[197] For example, Loubère 263. See Dew 2009 for general context. The Jesuit expeditions of 1685 and 1687 were conceived as fact-finding missions with input from the Academy of Sciences (Tachard 14, 19, 274).
[198] *PL* 111. [199] *UP* for examples.
[200] Example of Jesuit immanentism: Tachard 45.

certainly did not attempt to take on the principles of Buddhist soteriology, for example. The strategy was instead to focus on essentially immanentist matters. One reason for this is that the French appear to have decided that the central battleground would have to be divinised kingship itself; at issue would then be the respective powers of the metapersons that the kings represented.[201] The form of argument is familiar from the playground: Whose god was bigger and better? Perhaps it was deliberately chosen to appeal to what was imagined would matter to 'pagan' kings. There was even a pseudo-pagan element to Louis's own propaganda, for gold models struck during his reign depict him sometimes as Apollo but more often as Mars, the god of war.[202] This theme was the centrepiece of Chaumont's harangue in 1685, which presented Louis as urging his Thai counterpart to

> consider that the supreme Majesty with which you are adorned on earth can only come from the true God, that is to say, from an all-powerful, eternal, and infinite God whom the Christians acknowledge, whom alone allows all kings to reign and rules over the fortunes of all peoples. Submit your greatness to this God who governs Heaven and Earth – this is something, Sire, much more reasonable than to report to the other divinities who are adored in the East, and whose powerlessness cannot fail to be seen by Your Majesty, who has so much illumination and penetration.[203]

The Christian vision here is not of divinised kingship per se because the king is 'allowed' to rule *by* God and not *as* a god; but the argument assumes that what is at stake is the divine power that protected and bore him on. If God is not actually present in the king, he is looming menacingly behind his shoulder. Exactly why the deities of Asia should appear correspondingly powerless is not made clear but is evidently meant to be empirically apparent. On the journey to Siam, Choisy also prepared his own 'harangue' in case he had to step into Chaumont's shoes. It began by boasting of Louis's triumphs and victories in order to make visible the 'all powerful arm' of the God that had sustained them. Even when all Europe conspired against Louis, his piety had ensured his ultimate victory.[204] Louis was indeed at the height of his military success at this point.

[201] Cf. Lambert's address, 1665: Forest 1998, I: 186. [202] Collins 1995: 83.
[203] Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 62; Launay, ed. 1920: 161; Choisy 1995: 208; Tachard 234–5.
[204] Choisy '*Mémoires pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV*' in 1995: 412–13.

When Chaumont's harangue met with no obvious response, he decided that his next step would be to press his case through a short written text. Phaulkon, ever eager to manage the delicacies of religious diplomacy, argued that instead he himself should present a version of it orally, appropriately prostrate and full of 'Asiatic eloquence'.[205] He reported having pressed exactly the same argument, only adding that it was the intercession of the Holy Virgin that had particularly yielded the greatness of Louis.[206] Information issuing from the trickster figure of Phaulkon is always suspect, which is troublesome given that he is often the source behind the source.[207] But in this instance there is a notable consistency in how he represented his contributions to the evangelisation of the king. The embassy of 1687 was more intent on pushing to a conclusion, and Narai had to promise to acquaint himself with Christianity in order to deflect their importunities. There ensued a slightly unseemly tussle between the bishop Laneau and Phaulkon as to which one of them would act as the king's educator. Phaulkon's approach was to pursue it more subtly and diplomatically but always with an eye on the immanent agency of Divine Providence.[208] Like the powers of the stars, this was a force that could be witnessed in history. Phaulkon advised the bishop to 'choose those principal points from the books that concern the providence of God in preserving states, kings, and their peoples' and present them in Siamese to the king.[209] He then had presented an account of the unearthly assistance given to Louis in the form of the flight of the Turks at the Siege of Vienna.[210]

In this respect, the embassy was building upon an already established strategy.[211] In 1682, Pallu had arrived in Lopburi with a gift for Narai of four paintings from the pope, three of which involved the immanentist dimension of sacred kingship in some way. *The Adoration of the Kings* illustrated the submission of kings from diverse lands to a higher lord in the form of a baby Jesus; *The Retreat of Attila*

[205] Tachard 302. [206] Tachard 304–5.

[207] Particularly in Tachard and Bèze.

[208] He probably proceeded very cautiously for reasons noted below.

[209] Constance Phaulkon to Pêre de la Chaise, 10 November 1686, Tōyō Bunko MS–48, p. 3. The text is unclear whether countries ('*pays*') or kings ('*roys*') are referred to. Also note Bèze app., p. 175.

[210] Bèze, and (f. 4): 'Our Savior was not satisfied with instructing men by speaking of the things of heaven and the Holy Trinity.'

[211] In 1673, the bishops had talked to Narai of Constantine and 'the marvels of his baptism': Launay, ed. 1920, I: 48–9.

from Rome, if we can assume that it followed the model of Raphael's depiction in the Vatican, depicted the pope as a kind of warrior king assisted by heavenly saints in driving back a pagan horde; while *The Apparition of the Cross to Constantine* dwelled, of course, on the central myth of Christian battle magic as the turning point in Christianity's history.[212]

This strategy would hardly have seemed obscure. Just as in every other society considered in this book, warfare was already an enchanted arena of life. In their military encounters with the Siamese in 1688, the French learned that their opponents had had their resolve stiffened by the protective magic offered by Buddhist monks in the form of amulets, rosaries and special symbols. The French hoped to disconfirm these beliefs by showing how their technology could kill the Siamese anyway.[213] These events may well be the kernel of the much later accounts in the Ayutthaya chronicle of the demonstrations of Siamese magical invulnerability in France.[214]

There is, however, one central reason why the Constantinian line of argument was less likely to make a deep impact on Narai. Unlike most of the other rulers examined as cases here, Narai was not facing anything like an existential crisis. His armies were still engaged in war from time to time.[215] But as Chris Baker has pointed out, he did not lead his men into battle anymore.[216] As the greatest power in the region, Narai was neither threatened by warfare nor dependent on it for charisma.

What of bodily health, the other arena of existential crisis that recurs in ruler conversion cases? Here again, there were already many different kinds of ritual specialists who claimed powers of healing, including monks.[217] The region was perhaps unusually subject to the ravages of

[212] Duchesne to the Directors, 13 November 1682, in Launay, ed. 1920, I: 114. On 'The Retreat of Attila' in the Vatican: Harris 2008: 108–9.

[213] Le Blanc 1692, I: 253–4; Desfarges 1691: 37–8; Vollant des Verquains 1691: 91–2.

[214] *RCA* 274. The mythic imagination is here both recognising and overcoming memories of technology pitted against Siamese magic. Compare stories about Somdet To: Jackson 2016: 856.

[215] He also offered venerations to the Buddha as 'Holy King of Victory' (*RCA* 300–1), which Chris Baker suggests is the famous Phra Jinaraja image as in Phitsanulok. Dhiravat 1984: 284–7, 291, 306–99, 333, 337 on his campaigns.

[216] Baker 2013.

[217] Loubère 212, 258–9, 266–7; Gervaise 199; Tachard 410–11; Tachard 1689: 252.

disease.[218] One of the earliest strategies of the MEP had been to gain access to the more intimate recesses of Siamese society through advertising their medical skills such as bloodletting.[219] Étienne Paumard became one of Narai's personal physicians in this way, while the impact on popular consciousness is indicated by the Jesuit report that even during the persecution of Christians in 1688, people cried out to them on the streets for their remedies.[220]

Evidently, the Siamese might have made little distinction between the medical powers of the missionaries and their ritual techniques, for as early as 1667, there were those in the palace who were wondering if the Christian deity could indeed work wonders. The problem for the mission was that it involved a medical situation over which they had little 'conceptual control', which is to say that it was highly unlikely that a positive outcome would come about anyway through natural processes. It did, however, involve someone very close to Narai: his half-brother, Aphaithot, a possible contender for the succession, who suffered from some sort of physical deformity that left him partially paralyzed.[221] If Christianity proved itself capable of transforming someone so close to the throne, it would be difficult for rulers who needed to monopolise such powers for themselves to disregard it.

Although it comes long before the dramas of the 1680s, this was then the best chance the mission had to prove to Narai the power of Christianity as an immanentist force. It is striking that it arose during the very first real attempt at royal evangelisation that the MEP enjoyed. Whatever else they thought they were illustrating with their book of pictures and texts in Siamese (see above) in 1667, this was how in fact they made their impact.[222] The prince sent for a missionary in the explicit hope that 'all powerful God' would provide a cure and then decided to undergo instruction in the faith, to send prayers heavenward, and finally to make two professions of faith, on 1 December 1667 and 6 January 1668. At this point, Narai's interest was caught, and he conferred with his 'chief diviner', probably his Brahmin chief

[218] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 175–8.
[219] *Relation des Missions … années 1672 …* 1680: 60, on Laneau's strategy of saving 'souls under the pretext of healing bodies'. More generally on healing: Alberts 2013a: 109–112: Forest 1998, I: 185–6, 196; III, 367, 374.
[220] Loubère 257–8; Le Blanc 1692, I: 297.
[221] Documents in Launay, ed. 1920, I: 19–20.
[222] Love 1999: 15.

astrologer, as to how to respond.[223] The approach they took was, characteristically, to make this explicitly a matter of empirical test. The Brahmin put it to the missionaries that they should try to 'obtain a miracle from God in order to provide confirmation of their religion: after this he assured them that the king would believe in the God that they worshipped' – as indeed would he.

The missionaries prayed and fasted as hard as they could, but God did not step in to assist them, even though they suffered daily reminders from the king that he was still waiting for the miracle to occur. The missionaries played for time by saying that they doubted the faith of those who demanded miracles more out of curiosity than the desire to convert. Eventually, the missionaries claimed that they saw the blood begin to return to the veins of the prince and his flesh to grow a little. It is doubtful whether anyone else was convinced, and mentions of this prince in later accounts still refer to his paralysis. At this point the missionaries argued that God had done his bit in starting off a miracle and would only complete it once Narai on his part fulfilled his promise to convert. This was an unconvincing cop-out, and after this Narai's interest in the mission was extinguished for more than five years.[224]

Aphaithot's motivations in this affair, besides some genuine hope in his rehabilitation, are not difficult to penetrate. He conforms to a generic type from our comparative perspective: Princes everywhere who are side-lined in succession struggles and with little to lose have been willing to dally with Christianity in order to gain some sort of advantage. Indeed, in his obvious unsuitability for the throne, Aphaithot is a particularly subalternised example.[225] But Narai's motivations are much more intriguing, especially since we have here such explicit and contemporary evidence of a royal Constantinian wager. There is, moreover, little reason to attribute it to missionary propaganda because the result was so disheartening (it would have been easier to draw a veil over the affair).

The first excuse employed by the missionaries – that the king made his wager out of mere curiosity – provides us with a clue that even they

[223] Launay, ed. 1920, I: 19–20.
[224] Forest 1998, I: 188–9 emphasises intra-order conflict played a role.
[225] See Chapter 10; Strathern 2007a.

wondered at his sincerity at this stage.[226] It is possible that Narai fully expected, in a rather hard-headed way, that a miracle would not be forthcoming and that the resulting failure would be a clever way of defusing any threat to his position deriving from an alliance between a royal prince and the new faith. But Narai may also have considered that he could have something to gain if indeed a miracle was to take place. For what would have been demonstrated? The immanent power of a particular deity. There was not necessarily anything in that to trouble the overarching status of Buddhism, merely another ritual resource to be deployed and harnessed for this-worldly ends. There is again a clue to this in the missionary account: the claim that when what they were asking for – a 'general change of religion throughout the whole kingdom' – became clear, the subject was dropped and communication ceased entirely. In other words, it was when the court understood that the missionaries demanded not recognition of their deity and his potential immanentist utility but an exclusivist, monotheistic conversion involving the repudiation of Buddhism that they were suddenly dropped.

Narai's interest in the mundane healing powers of the missionaries would be reignited following the devastations of a smallpox epidemic in 1681–1682, which again led him to take a characteristically empiricist and experimentalist interest in European techniques.[227] The medical strategy of the missionaries would eventually bring them to the ne plus ultra for all proselytisers, the death-bed on which Narai lay in 1688. In the last weeks of his life, Phaulkon, Paumard and Claude de Bèze used their access to him to try to claim his soul at the last, referring to a healing miracle performed by Francis Xavier. But with no result. Narai died to the sound of monks chanting from the rooms next to his own.[228]

[226] Who would not be curious? Bowring (1857, I: 337) reports a later Siamese response to missionary efforts: 'If miracles were worked to convert your forefathers why do you not work miracles to convert us?'

[227] Alberts 2021; Launay, ed. 1920: 16, 78–80.

[228] Bèze 145 reports that he and Phaulkon 'had reason to believe that the king had contemplated conversion', and Phaulkon claimed that a story of Francis Xavier's miracle-healing had impressed Narai, but this is dubious. All reports (also Le Blanc 1692, I; 222–3, 345–50; Tachard 1689: 293; Vollant des Verquains 1691: 5) note the difficulty of evangelising through a Chinese doctor as a translator, perhaps under instructions from Phetracha.

Narai's Response

A fourth form of persuasion employed by the missionaries was bluntly articulated by Lambert: to argue that Christianity was useful for princes as a tool of social discipline 'because its laws oblige Christians to be faithful and very obedient to their sovereigns under pain of damnation'.[229] But if this might have made some sense in Japan during the *sengoku* period, it was surely a brazen argument to bring to Siam. Wave after wave of orientalist description of the kingdom had marvelled at how obedient the subjects of the kings of Ayutthaya were, to the point of slavishness, and how much this owed to the existing religious system.

Yet no system of sacred kingship is without its internal tensions, and what these were in late seventeenth-century Ayutthaya has already been indicated. The factionalising *khunnang* remained an ever-present threat, and yet the ceremonial exaltation used to propel the ruler above them risked isolation and confinement. The public rites of cosmic kingship were troubled, as we shall see. Opportunities for the generation of heroic charisma had diminished, while upstarts might still demonstrate their merit through a challenge, and succession was ever contested. And still, there was the perpetual negotiation of status with the sangha.[230] A priori, there were then some reasons why a king of Ayutthaya might be attracted towards the third element in the model of ruler conversion: the opportunity to entirely reconstruct principles of political authority. This is surely most appealing when the existing tensions have developed into crises, and when the imaginative capacity of the ruler permits a radical response.

Escaping Ayutthayan Kingship

To what extent, then, was Narai a visionary, restlessly pacing the limits of his own cultural inheritance? The French sources are unanimous in their regard for Narai's capacity to not merely enjoy foreign objects but to explore – from his palace – foreign cultures.[231] Phaulkon brought

[229] Launay, ed. 1920, I: 103. Echoed in Choisy '*Mémoires pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV*' in 1995: 414; Tachard 306. Compare arguments made by Louis le Comte during the mission to China of 1688 (Minuti 2012: 113).

[230] See introduction for 'ritualisation trap'.

[231] Chaumont 51; Le Blanc 1692: 17.

him news of the kings in Europe and in particular of victories won by Louis XIV.[232] He spent hours a day listening to a reader, evidently fascinated by foreign forms of kingship and governance, by history and geography.[233] He read, for example, Quintus Curtius Rufus's history of Alexander, which describes Alexander's famous demand for proskynesis, openly detested by his veteran soldiers, by which 'he strove to rival the loftiness of the Persian court, equal to the power of the gods'.[234] Perhaps at this point Narai gazed at his reader, who would have been reading while assuming just such an act of painful prostration, with a degree of irony.

In common with the broader Theravada region, Ayutthaya had a tradition of installing a Phra Maha Upparat, a vice-king, who was invited to live in the Front Palace, which can be seen as an attempt to remedy the isolation of the king.[235] This prince would be able to take on a more accessible role and discharge governmental functions more directly.[236] But, as we shall see with the case of Hawaii, diarchical arrangements tend to remodel rather than remove forms of internal conflict; the Upparat could easily become an enemy within.[237] Indeed, Narai had been given this status in 1656 during the brief reign of his uncle, Sisuthammaracha, from which position he had promptly launched his own bid for the throne.[238] No wonder, then, that Narai himself never appointed a Phra Maha Upparat and initially refused to move from the Front Palace as if indicating that this active role would not be yielded to any potential rival.[239] The palace was a dangerous place; the violence of his succession struggle still roiled about him. In January 1657 a conspiracy was exposed that involved many *khunnang* in league with his half-brother Aphaithot, who had been lodged in the Rear Palace. It was dealt with through the usual bloody purge.[240]

Narai was not quite 'trapped' by the ritualised existence he had inherited from Prasat Thong in the sense of being detached from the levers of power – but this was only due to exertion of considerable

[232] Bèze 12–13. [233] Gervaise 282–3.
[234] Loubère 343; Curtius Rufus 1976: 49–51, [235] Dhiravat 1984: 45–5.
[236] According to Reid, ed. 1993: 264. [237] See pp. 281–2 below.
[238] Dhiravat 1984: 258–73. [239] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 154.
[240] Note the immanentist dimension in the chronicle account (*RCA* 235–44). Phetracha resided in the Rear Palace before usurping Narai in turn.

personal effort.[241] Moreover, he seems to have felt distinctly claustrophobic. This conclusion does not rest so much on the speculations of French observers, who were struck by the personal humanity and intelligence of the king and inclined to imagine that he was dissatisfied with his own traditions.[242] Rather, it relies simply on noting where he passed his time. By the 1680s he was spending some eight or nine months of the year in Lopburi, a town lying further north into the interior from Ayutthaya.[243]

In effect, Narai was trying to solve the ritualisation dilemma not through the division of office but the division of space. Somewhat paradoxically, this was facilitated by the way kingship was so bound up with the palace and city of Ayutthaya.[244] By physically leaving the city and establishing a new royal abode he was able to create a new mode of kingship, which was less formal, more experimental and cosmopolitan.[245] There 'he is permitted to be less the king' as La Loubère observed.[246]

The activity that defined Lopburi kingship was elephant hunting, and this presented opportunities for a more active and less scripted way of relating to his subjects and visitors. The hunting around Lopburi allowed Narai to demonstrate the *celeritas* that the battlefield no longer provided, and in contrast with the heavy *gravitas* of the Ayutthayan mode.[247] He could thus display the merit that the taming of such royal and auspicious beasts was believed to necessitate while retaining the physical elevation of his court appearances. A further division of space was brought into play here, for his hunting lodge of Thale Chupson was to Lopburi as Lopburi was to Ayutthaya. It was at Thale Chupson that his most intimate encounter with the missionaries took place at a makeshift observatory there.[248] And it was while hunting that the king was able to meet the members of the French embassy of 1685 and speak to them with 'charming familiarity'.[249] Gervaise noted that when Narai went hunting he often dressed in the French fashion, while the palace at Lopburi was notably influenced by

[241] Choisy 1995: 305: 'When the kings were always confined into their palaces, the officials had all the power.'
[242] Gervaise 302. [243] Van der Cruysse 2002: 87. [244] Kemp 1969: 37.
[245] Tachard 265; compare Loubère 109; Choisy 1995: 239. [246] Loubère 222.
[247] Sahlins 1985: 90–2, following Georges Dumézil.
[248] Kemp 1969: 17. See above for the encounter.
[249] Choisy 1995: 277; Tachard 276–7.

Persian and Indian aesthetics.[250] Here he could experiment more concretely with aspects of foreign courtliness and royal magnificence that had stimulated his curiosity.[251]

Narai's Relationship with Buddhism and State Ritual

The result was that for most of the year, the great palace complex at Ayutthaya stood empty, this microcosmic mountain of the gods denuded of its deity. And the major temples and monasteries that clustered around the palace received no royal attention – except for the *kathin* processions at the end of the rainy season.[252] How serious were tensions between the sangha and Narai during his reign?[253] Perhaps they can be symbolised by a rampant monkey. Gervaise tells us that a *sangkharat* had exercised a function of ethical chastisement to inform Narai that his subjects were murmuring against him and his harsh punishments.[254] Narai's response was to send a large monkey to the *sangkharat*'s house to do as he pleased, which was to cause terrible damage. When the monk begged for the animal to be removed, the king told him that insolence from his subjects was a thousand times more unbearable than the antics of a mischievous monkey.

Gervaise is vague about when this occurred but his narrative implies that Narai's reputation for cruel punishments followed his reaction to an assassination attempt in 1670. In that year, a group of monks had planned to murder the king as soon as he entered a wat without his official guard during one of the principal ceremonies of the year.[255] This was the most serious threat to his life to issue from any conspiracy and an ugly expression of the sangha's willingness to translate their status into direct political opposition to the throne. It likely left him with an enduring mistrust of what monks got up to in their wats.[256]

The ceremony at which this drama occurred may have been the *kathin*. This would at least help to make further sense of Narai's striking decision during the *kathin nam* of 1673 to most visibly snub the monks by choosing this as the moment to bestow his patronage

[250] Gervaise 293. [251] Note Choisy 1995: 304.
[252] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 166.
[253] Bèze 1947: 34–8, 107 is unreliable: see Strathern 2019b: 186.
[254] Gervaise 254. [255] Gervaise 254.
[256] Turpin 1771, II: 62 is explicit but may be merely extrapolating from Gervaise.

upon the Christian mission.[257] Another assassination attempt happened around 1674, caused by his policy of protecting foreigners.[258] In this context, a report from 1675 that Narai had defrocked three thousand monks takes on the guise of a purge as much as a purification of the sangha.[259] A further widening of the breach occurred in 1676. This is when Narai suspended the ceremony of the 'speeding of the outflow' by which the floodwaters were commanded to withdraw at the end of the rainy season.[260] For that year, the waters obeyed him no more than King Canute: It rained, the barges were spoiled, and Narai was humiliated.[261] His astrologers, who had predicted fine weather for this day, were dismissed, and missionaries may have taken advantage.[262]

Apart from wounded pride, was he concerned about the implications for his supply of merit? Was he, in a more rationalist and sceptical fashion, embarrassed by the logic of this ritual? His move fits with a more long-term tendency to abandon the more explicit occasions in which the king used a ritual device to ensure that the elements yielded their bounty. What does seem clear is that putting the immanent powers of cosmic kingship too publicly to the test undermined the possibilities of conceptual control: Narai preferred to withdraw from empirical jeopardy.

Intriguingly, however, his reaction went rather further than that. At this sacred time of the year, the high point of lay gift-giving to the sangha, Narai ordered that the doors of the temples were to be shut and no one was to enter. This is described in a missionary report, which comments:

> Everyone was extremely surprised at it. And since that time, we have not seen him go to a Temple, in the manner of his predecessors, it was commonly said that he was of the Religion of the Foreigners.[263]

[257] See above, and Strathern 2019a.
[258] The role of monks is unclear. Phaulkon to Père La Chaise, 20 November 1686, Tōyō Bunko MS–48, p. 5.
[259] Forest 1998, I: 204 (citing Laneau to the Directors, 19 December 1675). Missionary reports tended to misconceive monastic expulsions.
[260] On this ceremony: p. 180.
[261] Tachard 260 suggests a longer-term process of disconfirmation. Contrast Tun Aung Chain 2005: 68.
[262] Loubère 221. Choisy 1995: 202 claims the missionaries took advantage by disproving the role of supernatural power in the abatement.
[263] *Relation des Missions . . . année 1676 et 1677*, 1680: 215.

The last claim here is probably wishful thinking, although such a rumour may have been fuelled by Narai's explicit indication the following year that he would not block any of his subjects from converting to Christianity.[264] At the very least, one can see how the act of shutting down the temples could have signified to his subjects a real antagonism towards the religious establishment. The sangha also played a role in the rituals dealing with the threat of the floodwaters, and a Dutch source indicates that he lost much of his credit with them from this time.[265]

Around 1684, Narai purified the sangha again, ordering all monks to undergo an examination in Pali and scripture.[266] Thousands were defrocked and thus rendered liable for corvée duties. As with his purification of 1675, such acts cannot automatically be read as antagonistic towards Buddhism; he was discharging his function as a *cakkavatti* by maintaining monastic standards in this way. But equally, such moves could serve political functions too and be carried out in a manner that aroused resentment. The last such endeavour seems to have happened in 1687, when Narai had several thousand monks 'reduced to the secular condition'.[267] As with Japan, there were material advantages to reducing the size of the monastic establishment. Around this time, a high-ranking monk of eighty had spoken out against the foreigners after an official was beheaded for offending a European officer: Narai had the impaled corpse of the man placed at the monk's door. Missionaries looked on in glee.

There is enough evidence here to indicate that the transcendentalist tension between ruler and clergy had become palpable and openly antagonistic in Narai's reign and that the king may even have been somewhat alienated from aspects of the rites of sacred kingship that he had inherited. He was not a warrior king in the mould of a Nobunaga or an Akbar who could use charisma to innovate a new and more

[264] *Relation des Missions … année 1676 et 1677*, 1680: 214, and see the letter of Laneau, 9 October 1677 in Launay, ed. 1920, I: 104.

[265] Dhiravat 1984: 325, citing a letter from De Jonge of 12 December 1676. Loubère 373: The monks 'preached' continuously when the inundation was at its height.

[266] Gervaise 198, emphasising Narai's need of manpower; cf. *Ship* 120.

[267] On 12 May 1687, the Jesuit Jean de Fontaney (letter in Tachard 1689: 258–9) reported that for a year the king had been 'chasing the ignorant out of the pagodas' and had now issued particular orders against the monks, extracting some for his service. Compare Loubère 373.

public guise. Rather his instinct was to withdraw somewhat, to Lopburi and away from even the few public ceremonies that were left.

And yet. All reigns have their challenges, and Narai was very far from facing a crisis. There is very little to suggest that Narai saw in Christianity any solution. Succession, to be sure, was exceptionally problematic, but Christian primogeniture would not have helped, given that he had no son. Moreover, most importantly, it was easy for someone as perspicacious as Narai to see that Catholicism brought its own version of the perennial tension between church and state. He questioned the missionaries directly about this in 1687–1688, wondering pertinently about why cardinals interfered with the business of the state or popes exercised the princely function of ordering people to be put to death.[268] Indeed, we know that he directly contrasted this with his brutal approach to the sangha: Here the Theravadin insistence on the transcendentalist purity of the clerisy directly assisted the monarch. When Phaulkon tried to proselytise to him, the king would only receive what appeared to him evident, and sought proof that God demanded the humble submission of one's judgment.[269] The demand for proof and the aversion to subordination both seem characteristic of the man.

Dealing with the Embassies of 1685 and 1687: From Religious Diplomacy to Armed Colonialism

The ambassadorial party of 1685 quickly learned that the hopes for a royal baptism aroused in Versailles were not matched in Ayutthaya.[270] Phaulkon affected surprise, when in all probability he had cynically aroused this excitement in the first place, and informed the ambassador that the notion of his conversion would come as a novelty to the king. Yet he also dropped hints to the mission that their hopes could in the end be realised.[271] The ambassadors soon guessed that religious diplomacy – or a desire to provide a French counterweight to the Dutch, as they saw it – was at work, but did not entirely

[268] Jean de Fontaney 12 May 287 in Tachard 1689: 258–9.
[269] Bèze 39, relaying Phaulkon's own report.
[270] Choisy 1995: 185–7, 212–13.
[271] Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 389–90.

give up hope.[272] They were encouraged by the king's obvious intelligence.[273]

Until his death, Phaulkon's policy was awkwardly suspended between two imperatives: the need to retain the continuing goodwill of the French on the one hand and grave concerns about the political consequences of naked evangelism on the other. He could only operate at all from this position because he was both the king's confidant and his translator with the French.[274] When Chaumont delivered his harangue, Phaulkon deliberately removed elements that directly proposed conversion for fear of what the 'mandarins' would have made of it.[275] Therefore Narai did not realise that the ambassador was carrying a serious invitation to convert until the letter from Louis XIV was translated into Thai.[276] His immediate response to that was simply to say, 'I can see clearly that the king of France wants me to become a Christian.' Choisy read into the tone of this statement a glimmer of hope.[277]

Phaulkon was not quite conducting the entire charade of religious diplomacy by himself; Narai at the very least acquiesced. There were three ways in which the pair sought to find some kind of middle ground between conversion and its refusal. The first was to show a certain warmth for the Church and its symbols. It was reported that he had a crucifix in his room and he scattered gifts of crucifixes to Chaumont, Guy Tachard, François de La Chaise, the Abbé de Lionne and Bénigne Vachet.[278] The second was to agree to the suggestion that Narai receive some education in Christianity. Phaulkon reported that the king had discussed the matter in council and had declared that the King of France was a disinterested friend and that he 'has sent me a proposal that I become a Christian, what is his interest in this?

[272] Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 395, and Choisy '*Mémoires pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV*' in 1995: 414.
[273] 'He is the most inquisitive person in the world': Choisy 1995: 248.
[274] Céberet 1992: 162 realised that Phaulkon, as interpreter, 'has the king speak according to his fancy.'
[275] Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 392. Phaulkon's excuses for doing this are conveyed by Bèze 35.
[276] Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 392. For the letter itself, see Tachard 240–2.
[277] Choisy 1995: 215.
[278] Choisy 1995: 248, 217, 415; Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 396; Chaumont 66–7, 72; Tachard 350.

He requested that I instruct myself in his religion; he must not be annoyed; it must be done and we shall see what transpires.'[279]

The third was more problematic: to keep in play the possibility of granting special privileges to those of his subjects who converted to Christianity.[280] The ambassador had resorted to requesting these (alongside some trading privileges for the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales*) once the main object of his mission no longer seemed directly attainable. The commercial treaty, which included granting the French the port of Songkhla, was granted. A treaty was also drawn up that affirmed the mission's right to preach freely and gave Siamese converts access to their own justice system and freedom from corvée labour on Sundays and holy days.[281] This was not unthinkable given that converts to Islam had enjoyed freedom from royal service for a period.[282] But Phaulkon, conscious of how unpopular these measure would be, was concerned to apply the brakes.[283] He first added telling qualifying sentences to the edicts: that the missionaries would be allowed to preach on the condition that they do so 'without insinuating any novelty in the heart of the people against the government and laws of the country [*pays*]'.[284] His next tactic was simply to delay finalising the treaty until just before the ambassador was to depart in mid-December, to hand them over to Chaumont at the last minute – and then simply not publish them in Siam at all ...

By this point, Phaulkon was desperate. He was convinced of the impossibility of attempting to introduce Christianity through the conversion of the king. In his secret memorandum, the Abbé de Choisy recorded a long conversation that he had one night with Phaulkon, who for once dropped his guard. The result is the most candid

[279] Choisy 1995: 251; Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 390.

[280] Choisy 1995: 185, 251, 260–1; Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 393; Launay, ed. 1920, I: 171–3.

[281] Choisy 1995: 263–6 gives the text of the treaty.

[282] Loubère 367.

[283] Phaulkon may not have informed Narai of the privileges issue at this point, although he was aware of it by the time of the Céberet mission (Céberet 1992: 98). Bèze 39, possibly informed by hindsight: 'Warned by the bad impressions created in the council by the bare suggestion of these privileges, Constance anticipated opposition, if he ever publicized them, would unite Talapoins and people and suffice to cause an uprising.'

[284] And they may teach subjects 'which are not contrary to the government and laws of the kingdom' (Choisy 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 263–4; 396). It is revealing that these qualifications were held to reduce the effectiveness of the measures.

commentary on the whole affair that we possess. The Abbé said to him, laughing,

> 'Frankly I find it hard to believe that the King of Siam will become Christian. Everywhere here is full of monks. There is not a single Christian mandarin . . .' He [Phaulkon] replied in the same tone, 'you are right; so he will not become a Christian and even for the good of the religion, it would not be helpful for him to convert too quickly. One has to start by converting a part of the kingdom. Has one ever seen a king change his religion without having [first converted] a large element in his realm? Moreover, the king is old and in ill health. Everything will change on his death and perhaps the Christian religion will be persecuted as the cause of the disorders.'[285]

This was written onboard the *Oiseau* during Choisy's return journey to France in January 1686. Phaulkon's predictions were therefore genuinely prescient. He was closer to the king than any European had ever been. He had been inducted into the innermost affairs of the palace, swallowing monk-blessed water and invoking local gods in swearing his oath of office.[286] He had independently studied Buddhism.[287] From this vantage point, he had grasped that the strategy of top-down conversion was never going to work; it would have to be up-ended: The subjects would have to be converted first.

If the structures of life in Siam would not permit a royal conversion, there was no way out of Phaulkon's dilemma – except, perhaps to attempt to rework those structures profoundly. Rather extraordinarily, he set in motion plans to do exactly that by means of a kind of colonial intervention. He selected as his agent the Jesuit Guy Tachard, who would return to France carrying secret documents for the eyes of François de la Chaise, Louis's Jesuit confessor.[288] The plan had two elements. The first was to effectively replace the entire top slice of officialdom, by replacing them with sixty or seventy men sent out from France for that purpose (he says that if these men are Jesuits they must

[285] Choisy 1995: 392.

[286] Loubère 304. Loubère accused Phaulkon of accommodating too much to 'pagan' practices (Tachard's unpublished *Relation*, in Smithies 2002b: 222). See *PL* 63, 98–9 on the swearing-in ritual.

[287] Bèze 38.

[288] Memoire of Phaulkon for Tachard, December 1685, in Launay, ed. 1920: 179–80; also, Constance Phaulkon to Père Tachard, 3 October 1687, Tōyō Bunko MS–77, and the longer letter to Père La Chaise, 20 November 1686, Tōyō Bunko MS–48. Choisy '*Mémoires pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV*' in 1995: 415.

come disguised as laymen). The second was to occupy Songkhla and another colony in order to capture trade and create a military redoubt. Then, should Narai convert, Phaulkon and the king would be able to ride out the storm of protest under French protection. This amounted to the establishment of Narai or his successor Phra Pi as a Christian puppet, for whom a massive deficit of legitimacy would be compensated by sheer French firepower.

All the worst fears about foreigners harboured by the *khunnang* were borne out by this vision of a surreptitious monotheistic coup aided by a fifth column. And it found a kind of purchase at Versailles. Neither the returning envoys of Chaumont and Choisy nor the Siamese ambassadors led by Kosa Pan who embarked with them were aware of Tachard's mission, although the latter did carry instructions to hand over Songkhla (which was a troublesome outpost for the Ayutthayan kings) and return with much in the way of French weaponry and Jesuits. Somehow, in Versailles it was decided to respond by instructing the new envoys to first of all bring to a conclusion the conversion of Narai but also to in effect carry out Phaulkon's plan of placing Frenchmen in all the key positions of the kingdom.[289] If this was not agreed, Bangkok and Mergui were to be taken by force of arms. Thus, when the new French envoys, Simon de La Loubère and Claude Céberet de Boullay, set off, it was with more than six hundred French troops under the command of General Desfarges. The Siamese ambassadors travelled uneasily.[290]

After their arrival in Ayutthaya in September 1687, Narai agreed to the stationing of the troops in Mergui and Bangkok, in the teeth of much opposition from his council.[291] Phaulkon knew how dangerous the appearance of French soldiers in such a strategically vital position would be.[292] He struggled with the envoys for control over them, in an attempt to preserve the semblance of local authority.[293] The envoys found, moreover, that no progress at all had been made in either the king's education in Christianity or the publication of the privileges for Christians.[294] At every attempt to push the matter, the envoys found Phaulkon and his de facto aide, Tachard, warning them the political

[289] See Van der Cruysse 2002: 376–89. [290] Bèze 64–5. [291] Bèze 88.
[292] Bèze 47. [293] Céberet 1992: 71–7; Bèze 81–2.
[294] Céberet 1992: 97–8, 144 and passim (108–10, 114, 117, 126–8) on privileges issue; Phaulkon to Père La Chaise, 20 November 1686, Tōyō Bunko MS–48, p. 2.

situation was far too volatile to push through the treaty.[295] They were quite right, of course.

What Did Narai Really Think?

His Majesty had opened his heart to him on this subject; that he was persuaded that all religions were good; that he had even said 'You are Christian; if you adopted my religion I would think you a scoundrel.'[296]

We do not know what Narai really thought about the proposition of his own conversion; we can only juggle and assess various European representations. The quotation above at least has the merit of issuing from Choisy's frank late-night exchanges with Phaulkon. No French source ever really suggests that Narai was close to baptism, even if they are not quite as blunt as the egotistical Chevalier de Forbin when reporting to Louis XIV: 'Sire … that prince never had a thought of it nor would any mortal be bold enough as to propose it to him.'[297] When the 1685 embassy arrived, Phaulkon wavered in how he represented the king's attitude. To Chaumont, he underlined that the king was 'extremely attached to the religion of his ancestors'.[298] To Choisy, he indicated that 'the King of Siam did not appear too attached to his idols but that he was still a long way from receiving baptism'.[299] The latter conveys a general impression that Narai had merely become detached from his intellectual inheritance without becoming attached to anything else.[300] The testimony of the Persian envoy conveys something similar, noting that though outwardly he maintained his traditional roles, he also showed an interest in Christianity. While no one knows what was happening in his heart, 'the most basic beliefs he held have been shaken to their foundation, his pagan faith is no longer so firm'.[301] On the strength of such sources Van der Cruysse described the results of Narai's intellectual enquiries as a 'vague deistic indifference'.[302]

[295] Neither the ambassador nor Phaulkon took the opportunity to press the matter when received by Narai. Céberet 1992: 117; Bèze 48.
[296] Choisy '*Mémoires pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV*' in 1995: 392.
[297] Forbin 1991: 132–2; Bèze 1947: 34. [298] Tachard 221.
[299] Choisy, 'A bord de l'*Oiseau*' in 1995: 386.
[300] As also in Céberet 1992: 98; and Vollant des Verquains 1691: 5 ('lived in indifference').
[301] *Ship* 99, and see 120. [302] Van der Cruysse 2002: 283.

But this reference to deism also reflects a much more definite contention made by some of the sources: that Narai had come to acknowledge an all-powerful if placid deity. Guy Tachard reported that when Narai realised what was being proposed to him, he issued a reply:

> I am extremely vexed that the King of France, my good friend, is proposing something so difficult, and of which I had not the least knowledge. I refer myself to the wisdom of the Most Christian King to judge the importance and difficulty one faces in such a delicate matter as changing a Religion received and followed throughout my whole Kingdom without break for 2,229 years. Besides, I am surprised that the King of France, my good friend, is so strongly interested in a matter which concerns God, in which it seems that God himself takes no interest, and which he leaves entirely to our own discretion … That order among men and that unity of Religion depend absolutely on divine providence, who could as easily introduce it into the world as the diversity of sects that have in all times been established in it. Ought one not to think that the true God takes as much pleasure in being honoured by different cults and ceremonies as being glorified by a prodigious number of creatures that praise him each in their own way?[303]

The appeal to the antiquity of Buddhism is plausible: We know this was on Narai's mind as he had ordered a shift to the Buddhist era in that same year.[304] What follows, however, has on the face of it no basis in Buddhist thought at all. It is closer to conveying certain currents of free-thinking in late seventeenth century France, in which early intimations of cultural relativism were helping to generate scepticism about revealed truth.[305] This is a characterisation of Narai that caught the European imagination.[306] It may reflect, on one level, Buddhist benignancy and a strand of elite rationalism, but in its full expression it represents the attempt by Phaulkon and the Jesuits close to him to deliberately manufacture an image for European consumption of a pagan philosopher king moving towards deism.[307]

[303] Tachard 309–10.
[304] See above. Compare Choisy, *Histoire de l'Église* (Smithies, ed. 1997: 195).
[305] For example, Betts 1984: 97–103.
[306] Anonymous Pamphlet of 1690 (Smithies 2003b: 159); Van der Cruysse 2002: 375.
[307] See Strathern 2019b for more.

6 *Repulsion from Siam: The Revolt of 1688*

To further win the people's hearts and minds he [Phetracha] had the rumour spread that the French had only come to destroy their royal house, their religion and their customs.

General Desfarges[1]

By the time of the arrival of the 1685 embassy, Narai was ill – an asthmatic cough, an intractable lung complaint – and was conscious of the question of succession.[2] The problem was particularly acute because he had no son, and his two half-brothers, Aphaithot and Noi, were both physically compromised and out of favour. Narai had instead adopted a young page named Phra Pi, an intimate favourite who could have expected to succeed. Phaulkon worked frenetically behind the scenes to influence the outcome. But he was bested by an even more skilful player of the game of palace intrigue, Phra Phetracha, keeper of the royal elephants.

Phetracha's task was made all the more difficult because of the awkward presence of French troops who had been left behind after the departure of the Céberet and La Loubère mission on 3 January 1688. It is true that of the original 636 men, the rigours of the journey and climate had left only 450 fit.[3] After a garrison was sent to Mergui, the remaining two hundred or so were stationed in Bangkok: The French had failed to observe that in Siamese politics possession of the palace was everything.[4] Through a series of impressive ruses on the part of Phetracha and hesitancy on the part of General Desfarges these troops were effectively side-lined during the coup. Narai's ability to influence events was diminished by ill-health and the reluctance of both Phetracha and Phaulkon to reveal their hands to him. When he did

[1] Desfarges 1691: 10. [2] Le Blanc 1692, I: 45.
[3] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 148.
[4] Le Blanc 1692, I: 93 on the importance of the palace.

finally learn of Phetracha's plans, he threatened to punish him as a traitor. This is what triggered the coup, the forcible arrest of Phaulkon, on 18 May. By the time Narai died, a prisoner in his own palace at Lopburi, on 11 July 1688, Phetracha had dispatched all other rivals to the succession and was master of the situation. His accession was achieved not only through the usual faction-building, winning over many *khunnang* and the Persian palace guard, but also through a mobilisation of the monks and the 'people'. If wars of succession had become de rigueur at Ayutthaya, the involvement of the last element was anything but.[5]

This chapter attempts to penetrate the subterranean movements that erupted in the form of the sangha-influenced crowd in 1688. It does so by considering the role of ethnicity but, more significantly, the capacity of Buddhism to offer both ideological and institutional resistance. However, we must note that French sources may be treacherous in this regard. They tend to deploy the same basic sociology of the coup echoing the 'three estates' of European political thought, distinguishing between three groups – the *khunnang*, the monks and the people – each of which are attributed with specific interests as well as more overarching emotions.[6] Only from a position of cautious scepticism may we conclude that they do, after all, shed some light.

Patriotism and Ethnicity among the *Khunnang* and the People

The general uneasiness of relations between king and *khunnang* in Ayutthaya was exacerbated by Narai's determination to keep his officials on a particularly tight leash and by the deterioration of his temper following the death of his queen and half-sister in 1681. When the adultery of his half-brother Noi with Phetracha's sister was discovered in 1683, Narai had him beaten so badly that he was left permanently damaged.[7] Elite families saw a particularly avaricious version of royal trade monopolisation developed under Phaulkon. The emerging mixed Asian–European mercantilism could easily be seen as hijacking the

[5] Baker and Pasuk (2017a: 167) refer to the new elements of the monkhood and the mob; compare Smith 2019: 210. A possible precursor of monkish involvement in 1628 (Baker et al. 2005: 268).

[6] For example, Véret, 3 March 1689, in Bèze 1968: 144.

[7] Dhiravat 1984: 343–6; Bèze: 70. Phetracha may have deliberately facilitated Chaofa Noi's downfall.

political and commercial functioning of the kingdom.[8] Although Phaulkon refused the office of Phrakhlang out of a desire not to antagonise the *khunnang*, they were naturally antagonised nonetheless by his rapid accumulation of wealth.[9] They had to watch the normally rigid protocol of court being bent to receive arrogant envoys from Persia and Europe.[10] The famous occasion in which Narai had to bend to receive a letter from the hand of the proud Chaumont in 1685 is depicted in Figure 5.1. One source claims that Phaulkon had tried to arrange Siamese girls to be supplied for the envoys' enjoyment, which angered the Siamese officials, who insisted that they should be provided from the Christian community instead.[11]

July–September 1686 saw a violent revolt of the Makassars, in which a faction of the *khunnang* and Aphaithot were accused, and, the following year, local *khunnang* in Mergui instigated a sudden attack on English traders there after the arrival of an EIC frigate.[12] When the proposition to yield Bangkok and Mergui to the French was brought to the king's council in late 1687, the officials were therefore already primed to agree with Phetracha's representation of it as the spearhead of an increasingly insidious European imperialism.[13] In January 1688, a resident Malay was so bold as to inform the king that Phaulkon and the French were conspiring 'against the service of the king, public freedom and religion', as the Jesuit Marcel Le Blanc reports it.[14] The Malay informant was tortured and thrown to the tigers, and Narai used the opportunity to complete his destruction of the Makassars. In the early stages of the coup itself, Phetracha dwelled upon these fears of foreign dominion in the accusations that he put to the French and Phaulkon.[15]

[8] Suffocating royal monopolies: Loubère 367–8; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 156–7.
[9] Le Blanc 1692, I: 50–1, 100–1; Bhawan 2007: 152.
[10] Le Blanc 1692, I: 20–30; Choisy 1687: 198–9.
[11] The anonymous letter of an English Catholic cited by Van der Cruysse and Smithies 2002: 324. Note Loubère 240.
[12] Van der Cruysse and Smithies 2002: 412–14; Hutchinson 1940: ch. 6. Aphaithot was imprisoned in the palace after this.
[13] Bèze 88; Vollant des Verquains 1691: 15. [14] Le Blanc 1692, I: 29.
[15] See also his treatment of Desfarges on 2nd June 1688 (Bèze 130; Le Blanc 1692, I: 218). Phetracha's reasonable suspicions of Phaulkon's plotting: Le Blanc 1692, I: 218–27; La Touche 1998: 309, 333; Bèze 1947: 88. Phaulkon was well aware of these fears: Constance Phaulkon to Père Tachard, 3 October, Tōyō Bunko MS–77.

Elite bitterness was certainly echoed by popular complaints about the brutish behaviour of the French stationed at Bangkok.[16] There are good reasons to be cautious of French sources describing *khunnang* resentment as part of a wider field of xenophobic popular emotion, but it must be noticed that before 1688 it was the *absence* of national and religious sentiment that French accounts dwelled on; the uprising was so disturbing because it upturned long-held stereotypes.[17] Suddenly, the French saw the famously cosmopolitan populace 'full of hatred and fury for our ruin'.[18] The engineer Vollant des Verquains had it that 'there were few among the two estates who did not allow themselves to be persuaded by [Phetracha's] speeches which had their foundation in religion and civic liberty [*liberté publique*]'.[19] Le Blanc tells us that a dissimulating Phetracha told Phaulkon that he could be king himself were it not that 'the Siamese would want a man of their people (*homme de la Nation*)'.[20]

But was there a 'nation' whose 'liberty' was at stake or 'Siamese people' who demanded one of their own as monarch?[21] Scholarship has tended to see cosmopolitan Ayutthaya as an uncongenial environment for the development of proto-nationalism or politicised ethnicity.[22] However, John S. F. Smith has recently presented a compelling account of how the Thai identity evolved over the early modern period. He notes that a distinctive Thai–Ayutthayan identity had developed over the sixteenth century but that from the early seventeenth century 'a revival of popular, court-sponsored Buddhism' emphasised the similarities between what he refers to as 'central communities' of the Thai, Mon, Lao and Khmer.[23] Increasingly spatially and socially integrated, the latter groups tended to become part of the expanding Thai group over time.[24] The performance of sacred kingship stood at the heart of

[16] Hence Phaulkon's insistence in correspondence that French troops must behave themselves, in Constance Phaulkon to Père Tachard, 3 October, Tōyō Bunko MS–77. Also: Choisy 1995: 258; Céberet 1992: 122; Bhawan 2007: 129; Hutchinson 1940: 166.

[17] Loubère 356, and see p. 185 above. [18] Desfarges 1691: 1, 21.

[19] Vollant des Verquains 1691: 15.

[20] Le Blanc 1692, I: 61, also claiming that Phetracha was 'honoured with the titles of liberator of the Fatherland and defender of its religion' (162, and see 52, 128; Desfarges 1691: 6).

[21] See Strathern 2022: 1301–5.

[22] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 206–8; Lieberman 2003: 275, 313–30.

[23] Smith 2019: 147. [24] Gervaise 45.

this creation of political-cultural community.[25] They thus became more firmly distinguished from various 'peripheral communities', mostly monotheists, such as the Japanese Christians, Persians and Portuguese. The latter were, however, incorporated into the state order through the appointment of *nai* (community leaders) and were thus distinct from the more transient foreign groups such as the Dutch and French, who operated on their own terms. Yet, as we have seen, at the same time, both peripheral and foreign communities were only acquiring more influence at the heart of the state. It was these tensions that were expressed in the Makassar revolt of 1686, the Mergui uprising of 1687 and then finally the coup in 1688 itself.[26]

Buddhist Intellectual Opposition

Let us take a step back from 1688 and consider what Buddhism looked like as a force of intellectual opposition to Christianity. It was a cliché of European accounts that the Siamese monks were reluctant to debate, which may be partly a result of the monks' capacity to perceive worthwhile aspects of other ethical-soteriological endeavours.[27] Yet the preservation of a rather stunning decree issued by Narai's court (although we don't know whether it was put into practice) indicates that as early as 1663, monotheism was seen as a threat:[28]

> These days many Khaek, Farang, English, Khula, Malays etc. come to shelter under the royal merit. Henceforth, Thai, Mon, and Lao are forbidden from covertly engaging in sexual intercourse with Khaek, Farang, English, Khula, Malay who uphold wrong thinking, so that people should not encounter suffering and woe but should follow right thinking, and not mingle together.[29]

[25] Smith 2019: 168–70. [26] Smith 2019: 147.

[27] See pp. 189–90. Forbin (1991: 138): the monks never dispute on religion, but when one criticises theirs, they answer coldly, 'I have been happy to approve of your religion, why do you not approve of mine?'. Also: Choisy 1995: 232; António Francisco Cardim, *Relation de la Province de la Iapon* (1646) in Smith 2011: 193.

[28] Also note the 'picnic incident' of 1636: Van Vliet in Baker et al. 2005: 45–62.

[29] I am grateful to Chris Baker for providing this translation of the text from *Phraratchakamnot kao* [*Old Royal Decrees*] 37, *Kotmai tra sam duang* [*Three Seals Law*], 1994, V. 98–9. Baker and Pasuk (2017a: 208–9) explain, 'Muslims and others from India and the Middle East (Khaek); Muslims and others from the peninsula and archipelago (Khula, Malayu); and Christians from Europe (Farang, English)'. See also Smith 2019: 181.

This does not express a generic anxiety about foreigners; it does not mention Khmers and Chinese. Rather it refers specifically to Muslim and Christian groups and their damagingly mistaken views, using the Pali terms for wrong thinking (*micchādiṭṭhi*), suffering and woe (*apāya dukkha*) and right thinking (*sammādiṭṭhi*). Particularly intriguing is the direct conflation of sexual and religious purity. An inner group of Theravada Buddhists, the Thai, Mon and Lao – indeed, Smith's 'central communities' – are identified as requiring protection from relationships with monotheists that could lead to a loss of their Buddhist commitment.[30]

Was this prompted in some way by the arrival of two MEP priests the previous year, Pierre Lambert de la Motte and Jacques de Bourges?[31] Their report of an encounter with a monk in Tenasserim in April 1662 indicates that the intellectual neutralisation of monotheism was already underway.[32] It involved an appeal to equivalent transcendentalist features of their religion that rendered Christianity redundant.[33] Indeed, there is abundant evidence that Buddhist monks and Christian missionaries saw themselves as performing essentially similar roles on behalf of essentially similar types of system.[34] Hence the perennial missionary strategy of describing opposing religious practices as mere 'idolatry', the crude worship of objects, was countered by the monk's response that such statues were in fact only for preserving the memory of men who had led saintly lives. They were no more 'idolatrous' than the images used by Christians. The force of this response derives from its understanding of an equivalent distance between popular and intellectual attitudes to sacred images (from immanent agents to soteriological aides) in both religions.[35]

If Christian proselytisers were prone to brandishing the textual authority of the Bible, they were met by the monks' own deep

[30] In this light, the royal decrees against Christian proselytisation of 1731 and 1774 appear less of a departure. See below, and Forest 1998, III: 360, 377–8, 412.

[31] There had been missionaries present for much longer, however, especially Jesuits.

[32] Previously stimulated by the presence of Islam? Forest 1998, III: 357. Loubère 253–4 on Siamese facility in debate.

[33] A Franciscan missionary proselytising the king of Ayutthaya in 1582 had been dismissed on the grounds that Christianity was simply unnecessary. See Ribadeneira 1970 [1601], I: 42–3, 161–2.

[34] Pascal 2016. [35] Bourges 1666: 170.

reverence for their foundational texts.[36] Missionaries attempted to challenge the soteriology of karma and rebirth, but Tachard noted that, 'When they are informed of these errors, they scorn what is said to them of the original sin and its effects, and they entertain visions of the disobedience and punishment of our first Father.'[37] Indeed, karma presented a more specific problem for the Christian story. Since Buddhism rejected the notion of sacrifice or scapegoat – that blood could somehow be exchanged for salvific merit – the suffering undertaken by Christ was not so much moving as puzzling.[38] If Christ had truly been a good man, he surely would not have ended up the victim of such dreadful punishment. The cross was a thing of shame. La Loubère had to recommend that in future the teaching of the crucifixion could simply be avoided.[39]

The most important intellectual move made by the monks was already indicated in Jacques de Bourges's account. The monk

> appeared to listen with satisfaction, confessing in the end that he believed that the Christian religion was very good and the God of the Christians and his were brothers, that his was older and more powerful than the younger; this was seen, he said, when a difference came between them and they were obliged to take up arms, and the younger was defeated, seized and put to death as punishment for his revolt.[40]

This is the first mention we have of an innovative connection forged between Jesus Christ and an important character in both canonical texts and *jātaka* stories, Devadatta. Devadatta was a kinsman and follower of Buddha who used his supernatural power (*iddhi*) to convert a Prince (Ajātasattu); establishing a breakaway sect he attempted to kill Buddha over several lifetimes before he was cast into hell. Many French writers picked up on the salience of this story.[41] But in the version relayed in Guy Tachard's *Relation* we see just how it far it could be re-fashioned as a medium for simultaneously explaining and castigating the existence and arrogance of Christianity. Devadatta even

[36] Loubère 416–7; Tachard 416.
[37] Tachard 385 (a reference to Devadatta).
[38] Forest 1998, III: 394.
[39] Loubère 418–9; Tachard 385–6; note how merit frustrates the logic of martyrdom in Le Blanc 1692: 286–7.
[40] Bourges 1666: 172.
[41] Loubère 426–35, 411; Choisy 1995: 308; Chaumont 1733: 89; Gervaise 177–82; Merolli, in Smith 2011: 365.

ends up hung on a cross in his hellish abode.[42] A number of writers confirmed the local equation between Devadatta's punishment and Jesus's crucifixion.[43] The missionaries had themselves been inclined to pick up on such uncanny similarities and had their own assimilative narrative to explain them. But only Tachard realised how far those similarities were being turned against them:

> Nothing sustains their aversion [to Christianity] so much as this thought: the resemblance that is to be found in some points between their religion and ours makes them believe that Jesus Christ is no different to this Thévetat [Devadatta] spoken of in their scriptures . . . and the fear they have of falling into Hell with Thévetat if they follow his doctrine . . . [They say] that they do not need our instructions, and that they know already better than we do what we have come to teach them.[44]

One important clue indicates that by 1688 the Devadatta equation had moved out of the monasteries to shape popular feelings. A contemporary missionary record notes that during and a little after the events of that year, there were songs sung in public against the crucified Christ, who was identified as Devadatta. The Christians were accused of having attempted 'the destruction of the religion of their country'.[45]

Devadatta symbolised the ultimate egotism, the anti-Buddhism that lurks within. His invocation signified that Christianity had shifted from being merely an inferior form of soteriology to an actively dangerous one. This discourse served to contain the threats of both similitude and immanent power sensed in Christianity. On one level, Devadatta was someone who was simply outclassed in supernatural power by the Buddha.[46] In Tachard's account, Devadatta's lack of skill in such matters is put forward as an explanation for why the missionaries cannot work prodigies (such as curing men, locating precious metals) in the way that monks can![47] On another level, his story conveys a profoundly transcendentalist ambiguity about the ultimate significance of such miracles. Note that Devadatta had attained his powers before

[42] Tachard 398–410. See Strathern 2022: 1309. Tachard was presumably aided by his intimacy with Phaulkon and his discussions with a monk during his return journey. Lopez Jr. 2013: 89.
[43] Choisy 1995: 308; Chaumont 1733: 89; Gervaise 181.
[44] Tachard 407–8; and Tachard 1689: 212–3.
[45] 'Recueil des Persécutions . . .' MS cited in Forest 1998, III: 385.
[46] *Cullavagga* 7.2–3. [47] Tachard 404.

making much progress towards *nibbāna*.[48] Such powers may 'work' in terms of attracting the prince – but this is no reflection at all on the worth of his teachings. La Loubère inserts an extraordinary note to the text at this point: 'The miracles of Jesus Christ persuade them that he is Tévatat, but it is necessary to make them see that the miracles which they attribute to Tévatat are to do evil and those of Jesus Christ are for good.'[49] What does the argument reported by La Loubère signify? A nullification of immanent power as a means to effect conversion. Any such magic-working the missionaries could claim only demonstrated how badly they had gone awry. In the context of the embassies of the 1680s, the story was particularly pointed: It turned, after all, on a moment of royal conversion. This must have resonated at a time when Narai's inclination to Christianity was the subject of rumour.

It was not until the mid-1680s, then, that the French began to pick up on the religious mobilisation against them. It was still hard for Christians to grasp hold of the sort of identity that Buddhism cultivated. La Loubère at least appreciated – in effect – that Buddhism was not predicated on exclusive belonging, nor on some notion of loyalty to a jealous metaperson, nor on an esteem for 'faith' – but yet remained mysteriously unshakeable nonetheless.[50] Indeed, as argued in *Unearthly Powers*, Buddhism was no less 'offensive' than Christianity even as it mounted its project of dominion through the encompassment rather than monopolisation of religious activity.[51] It follows then that it would not spring into aggression at the mere presence of another belief system but only when it was in danger of being dislodged from its hegemonic position.[52]

The Sangha Moves: The Social Power of Buddhism on Display

Nothing, obviously, would threaten the ideological primacy of Buddhism more than the conversion of the king. Although Narai had withstood the pressure exerted by the French and Persian embassies firmly enough, when he fell ill he was powerless to stop a rumour that he was about to become a Christian and destroy the Buddhist

[48] Loubère 429–30; Compare *Cullavagga* 7.1. [49] Loubère 429.
[50] Loubère 416. [51] *UP* 75–8.
[52] Collins 1998: 118; Forest 1998, III: 396 on the imperative to protect the Buddhist message for the salvation of people over many lifetimes.

temples.[53] Claude de Bèze relates an occasion in which Phetracha tried to hoodwink Phaulkon by arguing that he could even work to place the crown on the head of Phaulkon himself 'if you would only make it look as if you were of the religion of the Siamese. As for me, I swear I will do no more than retire to a temple.'[54] In his search for a pretext for usurping the crown, Phetracha charged Narai with the crime of even thinking about conversion and claimed that the king had passed word to the Jesuits that he would convert.[55] This is explicit evidence that a public Buddhist identity was a requisite for kingship.

If ultimately Narai remained with an 'incredible attachment' to his religion, then, it was not only, according to de Bèze, because of the difficulties of persuading someone of his age that his metaphysical inheritance was a mass of errors. It was because of the popular authority of the monkhood and the hatred they would conceive for a king who abandoned it.[56] It was the implacable reality of this structure of Siamese political life that had given rise to Phaulkon's colonialist plan: to meet the popular uprising that would surely follow a royal conversion with the crude counterweight of French military might (see above).[57]

It was not enough for Phetracha to merely spread rumours of Narai's infidelity and the prospect of a Christian coup; he had to stage-manage a drama of his own superlative Buddhist piety. He had been laying the groundwork for a long time. On the death of Narai's beloved queen and half-sister around 1680, he retired to a monastery along with other courtiers: This was a traditional response intended to generate merit for the deceased.[58] Phetracha spent a whole year there before he was summoned back to court. He made the most of this situation, excelling as a monk and developing strong connections with the monastic hierarchy and in particular the *Sangkharat* of Lopburi.[59]

[53] Bèze 95. Officials were already alarmed at this possibility regarding the embassy of 1685: Choisy 1687: 251. Also note *Ship* 99, and recall the fears of 1676 (above).

[54] Bèze 97–8.

[55] Bèze 144–5, also claiming that the Jesuits were therefore 'questioned more than once' about a missionary letter that spoke of the king's regard for Christianity. Phetracha also claimed that Phra Pi was being set up as a Christian puppet (Bèze 99–100).

[56] Bèze 34; Choisy 1687: 201, 391 on the political obstacle presented by the monks; Dhiravat 1984: 381–2.

[57] Bèze 40–1. [58] Bèze 60. [59] Bèze 77–8.

According to de Bèze, he displayed great reluctance at being levered out of the wat, and on his return to public life he took with him a monkish air of studied self-abnegation and even wore an ochre-coloured robe to approximate that of a monk.[60] When Phetracha's sister was involved in a scandal with Noi in 1683, he again sought to withdraw to the monastery, although this time he was refused.[61] All this allowed Phetracha to sound convincing when he claimed that his ambitions for his own person extended no further than the temple and that his only objective was to preserve Buddhism. He was only carrying out his duty to safeguard the monks from the attacks of a Christian successor.[62] Evidently, a transcendentalist deprecation of worldly power could mark one out as the most suitable wielder of it.[63]

Phetracha's alliance with the sangha allowed him to send agents to the female quarters of the palace – out of bounds to normal men but open to monks – which certainly assisted his machinations.[64] This helped cement an alliance with Princess Yothathep, an important political figure with her own links to the sangha, who was destined to marry the successor.[65] But more important was the access it gave him to the populace outside of the palace. There was no other institutional structure that could rival the sangha in its penetration of all levels of society. Men from all social ranks passed in and out of it and as laity engaged in almsgiving.

Lopburi may have allowed Narai to escape some of the ponderous ceremony of Ayutthaya, but it was by no means an escape from institutional Buddhism. This 'city of the temples' was an ancient centre of Buddhist learning and worship.[66] Now Phetracha used its many wats to assemble crowds of supporters.[67] These came not just from Lopburi but from all parts of the kingdom. Le Blanc observes that they were

[60] Bèze 79–80. See also Vollant des Verquains 1691: 12.
[61] Le Blanc 1692, I: 41–7.
[62] Vollant des Verquains 1691: 13–14, and see his letter of 17 November 1689 in Smithies 2012: 239; Le Blanc 1692, I: 48–52; Smithies 1998: 84, 90.
[63] Compare with claims Taksin (1734–1782) was reported to have made: 'I swear I do not desire the kingship for worldly reasons. I desire only to allow all creatures to live in tranquility and harmony, practising the Dhamma and seeking enlightenment' (Gesick 1983: 97).
[64] Bèze 99–100 identifies a pious sister of Narai's as the main vehicle for sangha influence, while Le Blanc 1692, I: 121 identifies Narai's daughter, who had been made regent. Dhiravat 1984: 436.
[65] Bhawan 2006: 96–102.
[66] Tachard 1689: 212–13; Wyatt 2001b: 56, 59.
[67] Desfarges 1691: 5–10.

hidden in the nearby forests but he brought them into the city at night in order to allow them to overcome their fear of approaching the royal palace. The Jesuit was able to witness these night-time gatherings because 'I was often exposed to their affronts in the cabin where I stayed alone at night among the priests of the idols of the palace pagoda.'[68]

When news of Phetracha's plotting finally reached the king and the order for his arrest was issued, his first step was to consult with the *Sangkharat* of Lopburi. A crowd was assembled the next day, 18 May, and at midday they marched to the palace with the monks' exhortations ringing in their ears. Le Blanc was in fact caught up in this crowd and saw that at its head, borne aloft on the shoulders of six men, was the *sangkharat*.[69] He must have been shocked: Le Blanc had spent six months living close to this man while studying the palace language among the monks – a perfect example of how misleading the surface equanimity that Buddhist monks presented to the missionaries could be.[70] The *sangkharat* had the side-gate of the palace opened and gestured for the crowd to follow, perhaps thereby breaking with his sacred presence the taboos that surrounded the palace: an eruption of Buddhist moral authority into the royal being.[71] Once the coup was effected, Phaulkon arrested as a traitor, Phra Pi beheaded as his conspirator and Phetracha installed as the new chief minister, it was the task of the monks in Ayutthaya to preach the justice of the new arrangement.[72]

Phetracha was assisted by the fact that he initially claimed to be acting in the name of the king and the half-brother princes in order to preserve the kingship itself. But this surge to the palace was also the result of ideological preparations that had begun before the arrival of the Chaumont embassy. The rich French evidence around 1685–1688 provides an excellent opportunity to discern how violent insurrection was effected in symbolic and cognitive terms, given the extreme

[68] Le Blanc 1692, I: 119. See also the role of monks in rousing the populace, in Vollant des Verquains 1691: 128.
[69] Le Blanc 1692, I: 144; Bèze 116.
[70] Tachard 1689: 218–19 confirms his previous amiability.
[71] Le Blanc 1692, I: 144–6. Bèze 116 has a different source. He notes in the margin that Paumard, a Jesuit who served as a palace doctor, saw the crowd enter the palace.
[72] Le Blanc 1692, I: 161–2.

veneration for the king that prevailed. The doctrine of merit, as discussed above, was the primary principle that allowed challengers to the status quo to claim legitimacy. A second principle was also at work: the notion that even the Buddha's dispensation was subject to impermanence.[73] Just as in Japan, the present day was imagined as an era of the decline of Buddhism.[74] This was not necessarily a fatalistic conception, however; it meant that the *sāsana* was vulnerable and needed protection, and it regularly generated millennial hopes that the coming of the fifth Buddha, Maitreya, would yield a great restoration of Buddhism. As Tambiah puts it, there was then 'always a justification and rationalisation for rebellion in times construed as immoral or in decline'.[75] A third principle was that dramatic events in the political and religious spheres could be predicted through astrology, omens and prophecies and thereby imbued with a sense of inevitability.

La Loubère affords a sense of how active Siamese expectations of a future Buddha were: 'This expectation of a new god ... renders them attentive and credulous any time an extraordinary character is presented to them.'[76] He then reports the events of some years previously in which a dumb boy had been acclaimed as a Buddha and people flocked from all parts to pay homage until the king feared the consequences and put an end to it. Before and after Narai's reign, *phrai* resentment against the status quo found expression in miracle-working holy men harnessing millennial emotions.[77] It was through such movements that 'the people' tended to enter the political arena in Siamese history.[78]

The key evidence that the sangha were preparing the ground for a revolt is contained in Phaulkon's long letter to Louis XIV's confessor, La Chaise, in November 1686.[79] According to this, in February 1685, a member of the king's household presented a petition to a judge that contained a long complaint against the Christian clergy. When he was arrested he admitted that he had been influenced by a prophecy made

[73] Reynolds 2006: 147.
[74] Jesuit sources on how all-encompassing the end of a Buddhist epoch would be: Gervaise 162–3, 194–5; Tachard 393–5.
[75] Tambiah 1976: 122. [76] Loubère 412.
[77] Note that Phetracha was not trying to assume this role per se. See Lieberman 2003: 319 on such uprisings in 1581, 1694, 1698, and Wyatt 2001a: 87.
[78] Compare the Phra Fang movement, 1760s (Gesick 1983: 94), and for other periods: Kitiarsa 2012: 16–17; Bowie 2014; Ladwig 2014.
[79] Phaulkon to Père La Chaise, 20 November 1686, Tōyō Bunko MS–48.

by a Buddhist monk that the king would die for being an enemy of religion. Then in March or April 1686 a paper was found attached to a tree in front of the palace at Lopburi

> on which was written that whoever found it and presented it would go to enjoy bliss (*felicité*) when they died. The paper described the peril in which the Siamese religion found itself. It invited the whole world to open their eyes to an affair that concerned public interest.[80]

This was, recall, a few months before the Makassar rebellion was uncovered in July. That uprising had been provoked by a sense that the prospects for Islam were also endangered and encouraged by astronomical signs.[81] In September of 1686, the Franciscan Morelli was most prescient:

> We are worried likewise that he greatly fears the Talapoins (Buddhist monks), and not without reason, because as they are in such numbers, and so esteemed by the populace, it would not be difficult for them to scheme and solicit support, and in this way they are the only ones in a position to seize control over the kingdom.[82]

Then towards the end of 1687, while the French envoys and troops remained at anchor after their arrival in Siam, and Phetracha urged in vain for their rejection in the king's council, a renowned Brahmin astrologer predicted what would happen from his reading of the stars. The French would be welcomed and given what they asked for, but this would bring disaster upon their heads, and they and their supporters would be massacred and chased away.[83]

After the departure of the French, rumours were circulated in the first weeks of 1688 'that March or April would bring a great revolution in the kingdom because Jupiter, which was always fatal to the state, would be in transit'.[84] Le Blanc is vaguer about the series of prophecies

[80] Phaulkon to Père La Chaise, 20 November 1686, Tōyō Bunko MS–48, pp. 5–6. It goes on to accuse a Brahmin official of inaction despite being aware of the affair.

[81] Mission Journal, Launay, ed. 1920: 194.

[82] 'Breve relattione della Religione di Siam', 20 September 1686. Siam, cited in Smith 2011: 360.

[83] Bèze 88–9. Could this be the Brahmin astrologer who had engaged the French astronomers (see Chapter 5, pp. 195–7 above) and/or who was accused of inaction the previous year (Chapter 5, footnote 80)?

[84] Bèze 92.

and omens that swirled around the kingdom, which he attributes firmly to Phetracha and the monks and their attempt to make the coming revolt seem like 'a necessary evil sent by the gods'.[85] Even Phaulkon was disturbed by the atmosphere of impending doom that seemed have to settled on the kingdom – and so was Narai. In order to find out if the prophecies were true, the king consulted an oracle. This involved making an offering at a wat and then returning with a monk who listened for the first remark that was heard on leaving it.[86] The monk passed a man who was plucking hairs from his beard who said, 'Ah, that's the biggest one gone.' It was taken as a sign of the king's own death.[87] An intertwined Buddhist-astrological discourse had been used to convey a sense of the inevitability of some great impending disruption of the status quo, a necessary restoration of the *sāsana*.

The Agency of 'Le Peuple'

Jesuit sources tend to see the malign hand of Phetracha's plotting behind this cosmological narrative. But de Bèze observes that he decided to act when he saw how much it had gripped the mind of 'the people'.[88] If a traditional palace coup lies at the heart of 1688, we already have grounds for considering that the forces it invoked were rather more novel than that. French sources consistently refer to the agency of the 'le peuple', indicating the masses or the lower orders. If their analyses can be credited, the ordinary *phrai* of Ayutthaya had acquired a voice of sorts, and they had spoken not just for one contender over another but for a traditional form of sacred kingship over a rival one.

It is therefore important to consider whether 'the people' was merely an artefact of French perception, a chimera of European 'three estates' theory.[89] The crowd that marched to the palace might merely testify instead to the hierarchical operation of Siamese society, in which the *khunnang* could mobilise large numbers of men through the royal labour system, personal retainership and slavery.[90] It is certainly true that 1688 indicates that the necessary reliance on *khunnang* for the orchestration of labour placed a powerful weapon in their hands that

[85] Le Blanc 1692, I: 49.
[86] On omen consultation: Loubère 264–5; Tachard 374–5; Bèze 22–4.
[87] Le Blanc 1692, I: 54–5; Bèze 94. [88] Bèze 96. [89] Le Blanc 1692, I: 162.
[90] Dhiravat 1984: 149.

could be turned against the king.[91] However, there are several reasons, for concluding that there was a genuinely popular dimension to the mobilisation.[92] First, according to Claude de Bèze, on the eve of the coup, the manpower available to Phetracha – presumably via normal patron–client or corvée relations – was deemed insufficient, and this prompted Phetracha to turn to the monks of Lopburi to stir up the people.[93] Second, we may note the sheer extent of the mobilisation in social and geographical terms. Tellingly, it included areas where key positions were in the hands of supporters of Phaulkon and Narai, as with the governor of the city of Ayutthaya itself, who dared not 'oppose the fatal torrent which swept everyone away'.[94] Third, French accounts consistently emphasise the emotional arousal of local populations who made their 'extreme hatred' of the foreigners clear.[95] For example, in Mergui, Lieutenant de La Touche was betrayed by his Siamese troops, and he claimed that, as he walked under guard through the town, he was slapped and kicked by the crowd. They called out 'Hey! Here's another Frenchman, take him away, crucify him!' (Recall the role of crucifixion in mustering intellectual and visceral opposition to Christianity.)[96]

Fourth, there is some evidence that the 'people' acted according to an independent sense of legitimacy, which became clear when Phetracha had to reveal that he was not going to retire to the wat after all. He could not avoid the sense that he had betrayed the princes, who had particular support in the city of Ayutthaya.[97] According to de Bèze, their execution on 25 July turned both the monks and the 'people' against Phetracha; they now saw his concern for the 'public good' as a mask for his own ambition. People in Ayutthaya briefly took up arms but by then he had mastery of the military.[98]

[91] Desfarges 1691: 10; Le Blanc 1692, I: 119; La Touche 1998: 312.
[92] Argued in more detail in Strathern 2022. Note Phetracha's measures to please the lower orders on assuming the crown (Desfarges, 1691: 45) and his prior stance as a protector of the poor (Vollant des Verquains 1691: 104).
[93] Bèze 115, and note Le Blanc 1692, I: 144.
[94] Le Blanc 1692, I :156–62; also note Nogueira 2011: 218; Abbé de Lionne, 4 January 1692, in Launay, ed. 1920: 212.
[95] Desfarges 1691: 18, 32; Vollant des Verquains 1691: 64; Le Blanc 1692, I: 185.
[96] La Touche 1998: 333. [97] Bèze 96.
[98] Bèze 146–7. During the siege of Bangkok, Desfarges 1691: 47–8 observed that the death of the princes 'much diminished the fury of the Siamese against us, which was at first so great and general'.

It may be that this nascent popular agency reflects certain 'early modern' conditions in Ayutthaya, such as the shift to an increasingly commercialised and urbanised economy in Siam that rendered the existing system of corvée labour increasingly anachronistic.[99] Certainly, 1688 itself seems to have unleashed a new sense of possibility. Baker and Pasuk argue that, from this point on, people were more difficult to control, and they refer to a number of revolts in the aftermath.[100] One rebellion was led by a Mon monk, Thammathian, who disguised himself as the prince Aphaithot, studied magic and led a movement towards the capital. Ayutthaya was thus besieged by a randomly armed mass, an 'undisciplined rabble' according to Kaempfer – which is exactly how Le Blanc had described the rebels in 1688.[101] These events in the aftermath of 1688 reinforce the sense that commoners might be emboldened to join in snowballing movements to besiege the capital on their own account (rather than simply as creatures of the *khunnang*), mustered by the social power of Buddhism and meritorious, magic-wielding insurgents.

The Persecution of Christianity

In the weeks after Phaulkon's arrest, Phetracha had most of the Christians in Lopburi rounded up and put into prison. Once again, however, there are reasons to be careful in assuming what this signified.[102] Here, the source criticism problem is the Christian paradigm of martyrdom, through which an experience of suffering is liable to be presented as persecution on the grounds of faith. Did the treatment of foreigners and Christians during the coup serve immediate political ends that the French sources, and particularly the Jesuits, misconceived? Perhaps the prisoners were mere bargaining chips?[103] To the contrary, in the first month, Phetracha allowed the greatest harassment of Christians when he least needed to influence French behaviour.

[99] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 192–3, 219–20.
[100] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 224–7; Bhawan 2007: 161–4.
[101] Kaempfer 1998: 37.
[102] Again, this issue is explored in greater detail in Strathern 2022.
[103] This was the case for a second phase of imprisonment from October/November.

In the first two weeks of the coup, Phetracha was particularly cautious because he could not yet predict the response of the French in Bangkok and had not yet secured his authority over Ayutthaya.[104] In this period several sources indicate that some or most of the Christians in Lopburi had been arrested, which was attributed to 'the fury of the Populace'.[105] However once Desfarges had been lured out of Bangkok to visit Lopburi, Phetracha loosened the reins. Around 1 June 'all Christians were put in prison without any distinction of age, sex, or nationality', according to de Bèze.[106] Once Desfarges had been received, told off and dispatched, and once it was clear that he was not going to attempt to defend Phaulkon, the Greek minister could finally be executed, on 5 June.[107] This was

> followed by a general outburst (*déchaînement*) against all the Christians. The Church and the sacred vessels were profaned; the houses of the Christians were pillaged; they were themselves stripped, they were weighed down with chains; and in a few days the prisons were so full at Louvo, that new ones were to be built in all the quarters of the city.[108]

At no point, however, was Phetracha himself anything less than calculated, and he allowed the Jesuits to remain at large probably as a conduit of religious diplomacy.[109] But their official status then had to be preserved against popular emotion. According to Le Blanc, the Jesuits were pelted with stones, forced into prostration when they passed wats and subject to the taunts of small children displaying the general hatred towards them.[110] Apparently,

> It had been rumored that they were sent by the King of the Christians to destroy the religion of the Siamese, and that three of them had been placed in

[104] See Vollant des Verquains 1691: 62–4; Bèze 127–30.
[105] The sources diverge a bit on chronology. See Strathern 2022: 1319, fn. 140.
[106] Bèze 125; Le Blanc 1692, I: 218 also has it that the Christians were arrested by the time Desfarges arrived on 2 June. Phaulkon's seals of office were taken, his house ransacked and finally his wife arrested at this time.
[107] In a later account, Tachard (Smith 2019: 67) claimed that 'if one believes what the Siamese have printed, it was holy, since they massacred him for having introduced the religion of Jesus Christ into their kingdom', albeit perhaps influenced by martyrological concerns.
[108] Le Blanc 1692, I: 279–80. Compare Anonymous, *Relation de se qui cest pasé a Louvo…* , in Smithies, ed. 2004: 102.
[109] Le Blanc 1692, I: 284–88, La Touche 1998: 323; Smithies, ed. 2004: 102.
[110] Le Blanc 1692, I: 208.

the Pagodas to observe the Talapoins and to discredit them. All this was not far from the truth.[111]

In reality, their position was far preferable to that of the Christians they visited in the prisons of Lopburi, locked into 'cangues' or stocks. Le Blanc's long descriptions of their plight confirms the general observation of other sources that nearly all Christian communities were targeted.[112] As Phetracha's grip tightened, Christians across the kingdom were rounded up and dispatched to Lopburi.[113] It is in fact possible to suggest various political motivations behind the arrest of some of the groups. But we cannot make sense of all the evidence without understanding these events as an expenditure of the social energy aroused by the defence of Buddhism in the coup. Le Blanc's description of the symbolic dimensions to the harassment of the Christians accords with other clues regarding popular anti-Christianity. These include the use of bamboo crucifixes to beat down upon a young Frenchman or tying a crucifix to the soles of the feet of a nun who taught women in the Portuguese camp.[114]

Once the French left Ayutthaya, their spiritual and temporal pretensions utterly destroyed, the few dozen French priests, officers and merchants who were left remained in an abject state in prison.[115] It was not until nineteen months after his death, in February 1690, that it was deemed auspicious to burn Narai's body atop a towering pyre. This was, as Dirk Van der Cruysse put it, a 'bonfire of the vanities', for loaded onto the pile was all the bric-a-brac of decades of religious diplomacy – or as a missionary put it 'the pictures of our holy religion' together with the portraits of Louis XIV and his good lords, all exposed 'to the mockery of people of different nations'.[116]

[111] Le Blanc 1692, I: 206. The reference to the 'observation' of the monks suggests some resentment of Jesuit practices of accommodation.

[112] But not the Dutch or the Japanese, for reasons explained in Strathern 2022: 1318–25.

[113] Le Blanc 1692, I: 314.

[114] Le Blanc 1692, I: 302–6; cf. treatment of Laneau: Le Blanc 1692, 250, Desfarges 1691: 40.

[115] In the treaties signed to effect the French departure from Siam, provisions had been made to protect the Christians, but if they had ever been meant sincerely they were rendered void after Desfarges refused to hand over the prisoners as promised. Van der Cruysse 2002: 459–61; Smith 2011: 199.

[116] Martineau to the Directors, 12 July 1689, in Launay, ed. 1920: 203–4, fn. 1.

The rebels in 1688 were not intent on wiping the kingdom clean of Christianity, but they were determined to display their rejection of Christianity as a proselytising force – triggered by the threat it posed to the hegemonic position of Buddhism. This helps to explain why it was 'native or naturalised Christians' – which we may take to be a reference to the Theravada 'Central Communities' of Thai, Mon and Lao – who were targeted in the first actions.[117] It also explains the reports that on 14 June, and regularly thereafter, there were attempts to make prisoners apostatise, telling them that if they would pray at the *wats* they would be released – a kind of forced re-conversion.[118]

This did not amount to the sudden acquisition of a monotheistic-style attitude towards religious identity.[119] Popular emotions may have been inflamed, but they died down quite quickly.[120] Still, it may be that the arousal of an anti-conversion sensibility had produced a lasting change in how proselytising monotheisms were viewed. One way of gauging what the meaning of 1688 may have been for the Siamese free from the colourings of the French sources is to consider how it passed into folk memory.[121] Eighteenth-century mural paintings in several wats provide one such glimpse. They clearly reflect the cosmopolitanism of the era in their depiction of various foreign figures, but European and Muslim figures are made to speak to the theme of religious conflict. Most striking are the murals of Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam in Phetchaburi, to the south of Bangkok. They are painted in a manner distinct from the courtly art of Ayutthaya and, unusually, can be precisely dated to 1734. As Maurizio Peleggi has shown, one scene depicts a meeting described in the scriptures between the Buddha and the gurus of heretic sects. Here the latter are dressed in the Mughal style; they are shown being defeated by Buddha's miracles.[122] Another

[117] 'Recueil des Persécutions' MS cited in Forest 1998, III: 385.

[118] Le Blanc 1692, I: 299. There are grounds for suspecting the influence of a martyrdom narrative here, but it is contextually plausible, and compare the Portuguese source *Novas do Reyno de Siam*, in Smith 2011: 363.

[119] Compare Strathern 2007a: 212.

[120] Forest 1998, III: 369; Bèze, Appendix VII; Letter of Poquet, 27 December 1696, in Launay, ed. 1920: 332.

[121] For an example of a later court perspective: *RCA* 304–6.

[122] Peleggi 2012: 61–2, which also discusses an intriguing cabinet from the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century that may represent the Safaid Shah who had attempted to convert Narai. Thanks to Chris Baker for sending me a copy of this picture and drawing my attention to it.

scene depicts the failed attempt by Devadatta to kill Buddha by unleashing an elephant upon him: A group of European figures is shown below forced to marvel at this event. They are looking up to a queer figure, a monk with the hat and moustache of a European. He is probably a Jesuit or MEP priest in accommodative mode, dressed as a Buddhist monk and now forced to accept the power of the *dhamma* through the miracle. The murals at Wat Khongkharam, meanwhile, show European soldiers as making up the demon troops who threatened the Buddha while he meditated: a perfect expression of the way in which the European political threat was conflated with a threat to Buddhism itself.[123] Just as in Japan, then, long after the actual threat from Christians was neutered, it lingered in the popular memory as a symbol of dangerous heresy and became pressed into the service of Buddhist didacticism.

The Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam murals were painted a few years after the 1731 decree had been passed in the name of King Thai Sa. This prohibited missionaries from translating materials into Cambodian and Siamese scripts, preaching in Siamese, converting 'Siamese, Mon and Lao', or writing books that showed contempt for the Siamese religion. Any Siamese, Mon or Lao who embraced the Christian religion in future 'shall be condemned to death and publicly impaled in front of the seminary'.[124] The boundaries around the Theravada community have remained stiffly in place.

It only remains to consider what the coup resulted in. Phetracha's popularity was enhanced by the charisma or merit that he had won as commander of the elephants in battle with the Peguans, but he lacked royal blood.[125] He quickly moved to establish the routinised authority of cosmic kingship, moving his main residence back to Ayutthaya and, indeed, to the Rear Palace.[126] He left the Front Palace for his son Sorasek, whose rather malign agency correspondingly burgeoned.[127] Phetracha, previously so open and ready to act, now withdrew.

[123] No Na Paknam 1994: 16, 94–5; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 164–5.
[124] Breazeale 2017: 5–6. A missionary report from 1745 indicates this was still severely maintained: Poivre 2009 [1745]: 182–6, which also notes the extraordinary veneration of monks and the total failure of evangelisation. Also note Trakulhun 2016: 143.
[125] Loubère 319 on Phetracha's popularity and martial courage.
[126] Dhiravat 1984: 325. *RCA* 314: His first ritual acts were Buddhist.
[127] Bèze 145.

De Bèze reports that 'he affected even more than his predecessors the royal Majesty,' which consisted of appearing only once or twice a year 'like the gods descended from heaven'.[128] If sacred kingship returned to traditional forms, Buddhism itself flourished, its transcendental-ethical qualities asserted by elements of a wealthier nobility, and Ayutthaya increasingly began to see itself as the centre of the Buddhist world.[129]

While Siam had received its version of reforming Buddhism from Sri Lanka, over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that island had succumbed to the same sort of European threat that Siam saw off in 1688. By the 1740s and 1750s, it was now monks from Lanka who journeyed to Ayutthaya to look for leadership in reviving ordination lineages and securing the well-being of the Buddhist dispensation.[130]

Conclusion

What features of the case of King Narai indicate that his conversion was a possibility? It is true that proselytism in the region had been spectacularly unsuccessful thus far, but some missionaries wondered if this was simply due to the fact that everything depended on the king himself.[131] The religious field in general was wonderfully tolerant; the monks seemed open and benign. The Ayutthaya state was structurally rather cosmopolitan, placing foreigners in high positions over local officials. Narai was consistently willing to play the game of religious diplomacy in order to secure the goodwill of Louis XIV and the seaborne military-mercantilist capability that one needed to thrive and survive in early modern Southeast Asia. He was moved too by less calculating sentiments, including the genuine pleasure that he took in French high culture, its aesthetics and its scientific achievements. At the level of the royal personality, we have here a visionary king akin to an Ōtomo Sorin or an Afonso of Kongo, filled with curiosity about other worlds, terrestrial and extra-terrestrial. He seemed to chafe somewhat against the confines of the system of sacred kingship that he had inherited from Prasat Thong and was prone to experiment with new ways of being a king as in his country retreat of Lopburi.

[128] Bèze 154–5. [129] See Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 246–52.
[130] Pieris 2003. Although it was the Dutch who suggested Ayutthaya as the source: Dewaraja 1988: 100–1.
[131] For example, Valguarnera, Smith 2011: 140.

Moreover, the transcendentalist tension between the moral authority of the ruler and that of the clergy had become acutely frustrating.

But there are many more reasons why it was delusional to expect his conversion. These had little to do with the particular methods deployed by missionaries, which tended towards the accommodative and learned. To begin with, the diplomatic field was less promising than it may have seemed. Narai may have strongly desired French contact, but he did not depend on it. Christian powers did not arrive into a scene of rivalrous warlords but rather a large and relatively unified kingdom.[132] Whatever internal tensions were at work, there was no overt political crisis to take advantage of here.[133] Any sensible, long-term royal strategy could not risk alienating other seafaring maritime groups, including Protestant Europeans, who perpetually needed to be kept in balance.[134]

Moreover, by this time, European influence was liable to be associated with the threat of imperial intrusion. La Loubère complains loftily about how the Portuguese had damaged the reputation of Christianity in this way – but the machinations of 1687–1688 revealed that the French were no less quick than Iberian Catholics to try their hand at colonialism or to link its progress to religious aspirations.[135] And, for all that seaborne trade mattered to both king and *khunnang*, Ayutthaya was not, after all, akin to the merchant-dominated city-state polities of island Southeast Asia insofar as political power was still heavily connected with the agricultural production and corvée manpower provided by a large expanse of hinterland.[136] The legitimacy of the king in the eyes of the *khunnang* who controlled manpower, and even, as emerged in 1688, for elements of the wider populace, was ultimately key.

As for intellectual engagement, while Narai may indeed have adopted a particularly inquisitive approach to metaphysical questions, the suggestion that he privately repudiated Buddhism in favour of 'deism' is an illusion created by the feverish desperation with which the game of religious diplomacy was played in its end days. The philosophical strengths of Buddhism are in evidence here, but no less important was its evident 'offensiveness', capable of deeming rival

[132] Alberts 2013a: 65. [133] Keyes 1993: 269, contrasts with Cambodia.
[134] Dhiravat 1984: 374. [135] Loubère 422.
[136] Dhiravat 1990: 139. The 1688 revolution underlined this rather firmly.

ontologies and soteriologies as 'heretical' and demonic if they appeared threatening enough.[137] Such identity boundaries suddenly exploded into view in 1688.

In other ways, Buddhism already seemed to inhabit an equivalent intellectual and societal space to that which Christianity hoped to fill.[138] Like scholars today, missionaries were sometimes inclined to see any shared ground as providing a potential bridge to conversion.[139] But Guy Tachard, after noting resemblances of doctrine, was forced to remark that, 'It is surprising that the Gospel should make such little progress amongst people who are cultivated with much zeal and care.'[140] This can be turned around, of course: If they were already so 'cultivated', it is not clear why Christianity would be necessary.[141] The transcendentalist dimension to Buddhism also configured the implications of immanentist competition. This was certainly a resonant dimension of the encounter: Christian ritual power and European scientific prowess could both be sensed as a threat. It is most strikingly visible in Christianity's first opportunity to influence the royal family, the invitation to heal, miraculously, Narai's half-brother. But the immanentist threat was met in two ways: Buddhist tradition simply asserted the overweening superiority of Buddha's thaumaturgical power while also subordinating the significance of that power. Mundane boons were ultimately insignificant; deities were samsaric beings, subject to the pain of rebirth.[142] Thus was the royal court free to absorb forms of this-worldly power without undermining the centrality of Buddhist commitment. Hence Brahmanic ritualism had been fashioned into a technology to manipulate and influence worldly affairs through establishing correct relations with appropriate meta-persons. The potency of the foreigners, whether ritual or technological, did not confirm the truth of what they preached nor their ethical status or soteriological efficacy; indeed, it might merely highlight their

[137] Loubère 416 on Siamese cultural intransigence.
[138] Gervaise 171, 200–1 (compares the simple teaching of some ascetics to that 'of our early fathers'). See Alberts 2013a: 58–9 and Pascal 2016 on sixteenth-century Franciscan appreciation of the equivalent role of the Thai sangha (e.g., monks were 'religiosos' not 'ministers of the idols').
[139] The MEP missionaries' first account of their faith to Narai in May 1665 focussed on (in effect) the common ground of transcendentalism: Mission Journal in Launay, ed. 1920, I: 16.
[140] Tachard 422. [141] Cf. Keyes 1993: 262; Alberts 2013a: 69.
[142] Forest 1998, III: 387–90.

dangerousness.[143] (A similar pattern would structure the way that mid-nineteenth century Siam could happily incorporate elements of Western science as essentially compatible with Buddhism, while classing the more miraculous aspects of Christianity alongside Brahmanism in terms of immanentist utility or superstitious excess.)[144]

But all of our observers intuited that there was something to do with the way that religion was connected with kingship in Ayutthaya that formed the most profound obstacle. The engineer Vollant des Verquains presented the coup as a parallel to the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 in Britain in which a king with absolutist, Catholic and French leanings was usurped by a firmly Protestant prince.[145] There too, elite anger at the prospect of a Catholic heir had been accompanied by popular anti-Catholic riots. In Siam the rumour that Narai or his successor might convert, or that French Catholic power would be instituted under Phaulkon, became so powerful a propaganda weapon that it helped produce what might be Siam's first example of mass political action. There was no explicit 'law' in either Siam or Britain that the king had to belong to a specified religious identity, but there was a significant structure militating against its abandonment nonetheless.[146] This may be what Vollant des Verquains means when he says that both revolutions of 1688 were the result of the 'same disposition'.[147]

What lay behind this disposition in Siam? To approach this comparatively, it is immediately clear that, unlike in Japan, the Thai king was neither an emperor ritualised and aestheticised out of the political sphere nor a mere warlord having to improvise new means of securing legitimacy. Instead his role was deeply sacralised in both divinised and righteous dimensions. The king was the pinnacle of a system of hierarchy that had lodged itself deep into the body memory of the court and wider society. The great taboos surrounding the royal presence, for example, may have amounted to an onerous

[143] Forest 1998, III: 374, 380, 406, 420, 434.
[144] Reynolds 1976; Keyes 1993: 270. Thus, reformist transcendentalism and rationalist deprecation of immanentism went hand-in-hand.
[145] Vollant des Verquains 1691: dedication. [146] Sedley 2015: 19–20.
[147] The Dutch were implicated too in both cases. Meanwhile, the 1680s was precisely the era when something like a modern meaning of 'revolution' began to emerge in modern discourse according to Israel 2006, ch. 1.

weight, but they could not easily be thrown off without leaving one denuded of kingliness entirely.

Under the right circumstances, however, notions of political legitimacy can shift quickly or become secondary to the dictates of coercion. What barred Ayutthayan kingship from radical transformation? The answer must be found in the role of the sangha, who retained the ability to shape the moral framework that structured the political field.[148] This was something common to all societies dominated by Theravada Buddhism and was what rendered them particularly obstinate in the face of monotheistic evangelism, whether directed at royalty or commoners. For example, the Jesuit Fernão de Queyroz, writing from Goa in the 1680s but with no apparent awareness of events in Ayutthaya, noted how difficult it was to make headway in the countries of Arakan, Pegu, Siam and Laos because of the respect in which their monks were held.[149] In Ayutthaya itself, in 1670 Lambert had already remarked on how the kingdoms of Siam, Pegu, Laos and Cambodia have 'an opposition to receiving the gospel incredibly greater than others' because of all their 'priests which have an extreme credit in the mind of these kings and peoples'.[150] They may not have used the term or concept of the 'Theravada' in the modern sense, but these missionaries were describing it nonetheless; they were contending with a distinctively stubborn subset of the Buddhist world.

The particular resilience of Theravada Buddhism derived from the following: (a) Intellectual unity. Unlike the rivalrous sects of Mahayana Buddhism in Japan, there were no profound internal divisions in the Theravada tradition in Siam that could be exploited, and Pali scripture remained foundational, while speculative elaborations were forestalled.[151] There were no great debates on foundational points of doctrine into which Jesuits or MEP priests could insert themselves. (b) Clear hegemony. Like Japanese Buddhism, it shared ground with other ritual systems, but there was no equivalent to Confucianism as an alternative philosophical tradition of the elite. (c) Explicit disparagement of soteriological theism. Unlike the Mahayana tradition, which had already developed notions of saviour gods,

[148] Keyes 1993: 269. [149] Queyroz 1992:141. [150] Forest 1998, III: 363.
[151] Forest 1998. Note Tachard 410: 'It is their custom to reproach us for not having sufficient respect for holy Images, for sacred Books, and for the Priests. It is true that one cannot have greater veneration for these things than they have.'

Theravada Buddhism explicitly problematised this idea.[152] More significant than these were, however, the institutional features of Theravada Buddhism, such as (d) the unity of the sangha, which was not riven into competing schools, sects and monastic foundations, let alone popular movements at war with each other, in the forms that we see in Japan.[153] While it must have had its factional struggles, Thai Buddhism retained a tremendous ability to act in concert against a perceived threat. (e) For all the tensions between the king and the sangha, the latter remained structurally dependent on the former, rather than developing into a state-like structure as had occurred in Japan, where it had challenged princely rule and necessitated a backlash. (f) The presence of the sangha as a fundamental 'established' part of life at all levels of Siamese society. (g) The continuing ascetic discipline of the monkhood in living out transcendentalist virtue.[154] Missionaries and ambassadors alike realised the great importance of the fact that monks seemed to exhibit a superior morality to that of the Christian religious orders.[155] All these factors contributed towards the tremendous social power wielded by the sangha, just as the foreign observers perceived: The respect they commanded in the eyes of the populace could be used to shape political feelings.[156] Those Christians with the most realistic grasp of affairs in Ayutthaya knew that the conversion of the king was unthinkable for this reason. There was indeed, only one way out of their dilemma: to compensate for the want of legitimacy that would afflict any Christian order through the supply of coercion.[157]

In the longer run, the religious antagonism expressed in 1688 may seem like a momentary spasm. But it should be remembered that in Japan too the first official outbursts against Christianity had tended to be followed by more laissez faire periods of de facto tolerance. It is just that in Japan, Christianity did not go away but continued to rear its head in a vaguely threatening manner. In Siam by contrast, because of

[152] This is a simplification; see Holt 1991 for Avalokitsevara in the Lankan tradition.
[153] Forest 1998, III: 387, 442 contrasts Tonkin.
[154] Missionaries tried to argue that this form of morality was *too* extreme. Buddhist monasticism already presented itself as a 'middle way' between ill-discipline and pointless austerities.
[155] Loubère 397; Tachard 415: 'Their whole Law is comprised of ten Commandments, as ours is, but is much stricter'; Pascal 2016: 13–14.
[156] Forest 1998, III: 362. [157] Vollant des Verquains 1691: 151.

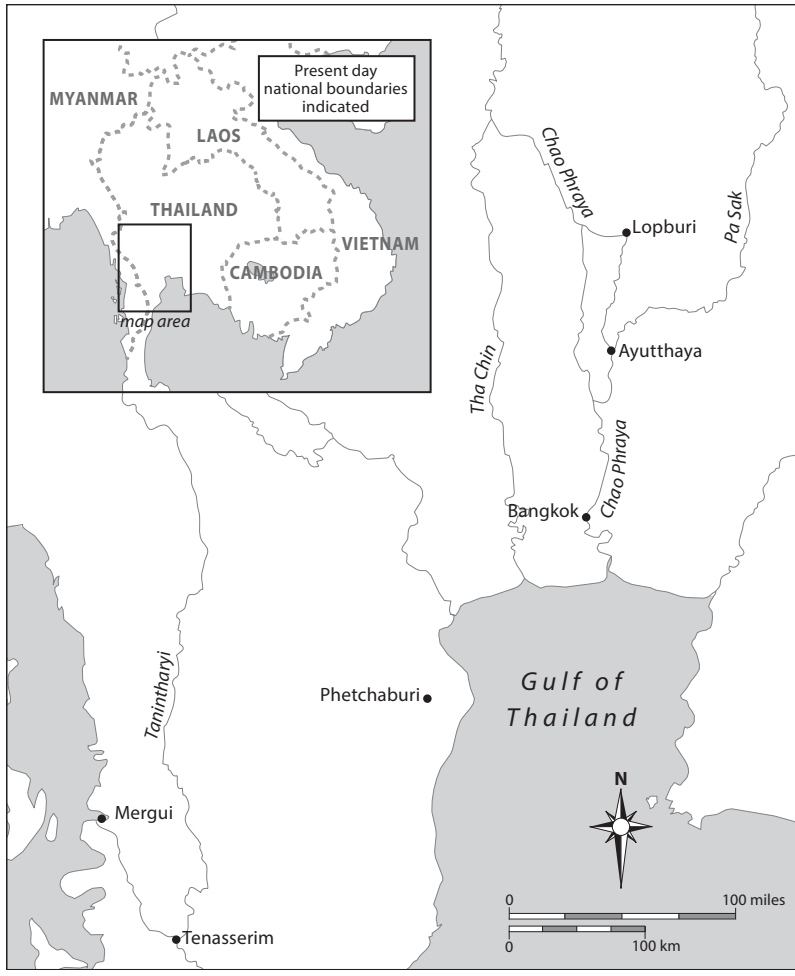
the total failure of both missionary work and the French colonial project, Christianity was never again a political threat. But, even then, something had changed in attitudes to Christianity after 1688: a greater defensiveness witnessed in the murals of Wat Khongkharam or in the interdictions of 1731. It would be wrong to conclude that Christianity itself was only rejected insofar as it was a political menace: It was construed and defeated as a religious menace too, a threat to Buddhist karmic progress and to Buddhist sovereignty both. Voltaire was broadly correct to say that it was when Christian missionaries revealed the true colours of their own conquering exclusivism that they spurred Asian rulers towards a policy of equivalent intolerance in response.[158]

[158] Voltaire 2000: 21–2.

SIAM

Audience Solennelle donnée par le Roy de Siam à Mr le Cheualier de Chaumont Ambassadeur extraordinaire de sa Majesté aupres de ce Roy, ou il fut accompagné de Mr l'Eueque de Metellopolis et de Mr l'Abbé de Choisy et de deux Gentilshõmes Francois qui lauoient suiui en ce Voyage. Il presenta la Lettre de sa Majesté dans une coupe d'Or, et le Roy se baissa pour y atteindre tandis que Mr Constans son principal Ministre vétu a la françoise et les premiers Mandarins étoient prosternez. Mr l'Ambassad.r se couurit et s'assit quand il eut saluë le Roy et cõmancé sa harangue, ce fut le 18 du mois de octobre l'an 1685. que se fit cette ceremonie auec une distinction singuliére po.r ce Ministre de France, qui fut visité de tous les Ambassad.rs des autres P.ces et continuellem.t accompagné et seruy par les principaux Mandarins
Chez Jacques aux plus de la Prudence C. Pr. Regis
Chichê 92 B 127181
G 15631 8
05429

Figure 5.1 Illustration of Narai bending to receive the letter from Louis XIV from the French ambassador in October 1685. Jean-Baptiste Nolin (attributed), *Solemn audience given by the King of Siam to the Chevalier de Chaumont*, 1686. Etching and engraving, 32 × 20.5 cm.
Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Estampes, coll. Hennin, inv. 5429. Reproduced with permission.



Map 5.1 Siam.
Map by David McCutcheon.

7 *Hawaii: The Road to Nowhere, 1800–1821*

No missionary had yet come to the Sandwich Islands; and, in truth, they could promise themselves but little fruit among this sensual people. Christianity cannot be established in Eastern Polynesia but on the overthrow of everything existing. We do not doubt the events at Otaheite [Tahiti], but, at the same time, we cannot conceive them; and M. Marin, who had previously visited these islands, told us, what is very clear, that the natives, for the most part, only visited the missionaries to have the pleasure of mimicking their customs.

Oto von Kotzebue, 1816–1817[1]

[The missionaries] had the satisfaction to find the way in a measure prepared for them, by one of those remarkable events which distinguish the eras in the history of nations, whether barbarous or civilized. This was, the abolition of the national idolatry, which, though it was closely interwoven with all the domestic and civil institutions of every class of the inhabitants, upheld by the combined influence of a numerous body of priests, the arbitrary power of warlike chiefs, and the sanction of venerable antiquity, had been publicly and authoritatively prohibited by the king only a few months before their arrival.

William Ellis, 1820[2]

In Tahiti, a small group of workers from the London Missionary Society had been clinging to the edges of local society since 1797, but they seemed to be on a hiding to nothing. Then some cog in the internal mechanism of Tahitian society locked into a new position, and in 1812 the chief contender for paramount authority, Pomare II, put forward his name for baptism.[3] His conversion was like a heavy stone plunged into the Pacific, sending ripples great distances across the

[1] Kotzebue 1821: 242–3. [2] Ellis 30.
[3] The reasons behind this are analysed in *UP* 276–310.

waters. From that point on the missionary dream of top-down conversion turned out to be an almost puzzlingly real dynamic of history across the entire region.[4]

The German-Russian naval commander Otto von Kotzebue, quoted above, had heard of events in Tahiti but could scarcely credit them and certainly refused to imagine that they might form a template for the Sandwich Islands, the name given to the Hawaiian archipelago by Captain Cook. The notion that Polynesian societies would remain implacable to missionary designs seemed a sensible conclusion given the nature of local society.[5] European observers recognised that religion had provided the sinews of government and they were tightened to an extraordinary degree, pulling 'Church' and 'state' together into a profound union.[6] Kotzebue was right to appreciate the 'relations of social order which are not founded on written rights and laws but upon faith and custom, which are more powerful than force'.[7]

But when he returned in 1824, he was forced to eat his words: The sinews had suddenly gone slack, and Hawaii too was succumbing.[8] By the 1830s, missionaries were aware that in their lifetime they had witnessed something extraordinary. Sheldon Dibble wrote that 'from the time spoken of till the present, a rapid series of successes has attended the labors of missionaries in the South Seas; so that island after island, and group after group have in rapid succession been brought to acknowledge the Christian religion'.[9]

Whether it was the labours of the missionaries that yielded this fruit may be doubted, however. Indeed, when they first arrived in the Sandwich Islands, the American missionaries were dumbfounded and even a little aghast that *before* their arrival the ruling chiefs had voluntarily consigned the indigenous system of religious-political

[4] Barker 2005: 88. After Hawaii, in 1819, Tāufa'āhau was baptised in Tonga in 1831, en route to his acknowledged supremacy: He subsequently took the title King George Tupou I. He was quickly followed in 1832 by Malietoa Vainu'upo, the pre-eminent chief in Samoa, and then in 1854 by Cakobau, the aggressive war chief of Bau in Fiji.

[5] Bingham 120, 218.

[6] Dibble 93–4. Compare Camille de Roquefeuil's comment in 1819, Birkett 2000: 86.

[7] Kotzebue 1821: 244–5, relying here on the oral testimony of the long-standing resident of Hawaii, Don Francisco de Paula Marin.

[8] Kotzebue 1830: 200–1. Surprise also registered in *PMH*, December 1820, p. 570.

[9] Dibble 1839: 219.

organisation to oblivion. There were two figures at the heart of the revolution. Liholiho was in the process of acceding to the throne for which his father Kamehameha had so carefully prepared him. The conquering king had tried to inculcate in his son a feeling for the significance of his sacred role through an apprenticeship spent in the company of priests.[10] Ten days after the death of Kamehameha in May 1819, Liholiho emerged from a temple at Kailua resplendent in a red feather cloak and a British hat. He was to be invested by the widow of the old king, Ka'ahumanu, who had accumulated formidable political authority in recent years.[11] She informed him that 'you and I will share the land together'.[12]

It was customary for the death of a high chief to be followed by a temporary suspension of tabu (*kapu* in Hawaiian), a period of prescribed anarchy in which the normal principles of hierarchy were in abeyance. Liholiho was sent to Kawaihae to be kept apart from the pollution of this inchoate time.[13] But the young king's ritual preparations seemed to collapse into a kind of inebriated despair. When he finally returned to Kona in November to complete his installation and reinstate the *kapu*, he hesitated, and then placed himself with the women and 'began to eat with a fury of appetite that showed he was doing violence to himself'.[14] The assembled subjects watched with horror. The young king was breaking the *ai kapu*, which insisted that men and women must eat separately, on pain of death, and which was considered the most fundamental *kapu* of all. But the gods remained silent. Shortly afterwards Liholiho issued commands to destroy the temples, tear down the 'idols' and abolish the priesthood.[15] Thus the system of divinised kingship and chiefly distinction proceeded to devour itself.

Yet this is most crucial: The high chiefs would not actually be baptised until 1825. What makes the Hawaiian case particularly intriguing therefore is that the question of the vulnerability of the old system is somewhat separated from that of the appeal of the new.

[10] 'Ī'ī 24–6. [11] 'Ī'ī 52–3.
[12] Bingham 73; Kamakau 2022: 395; Dibble 149–50; Ellis 126–77.
[13] Kame'eleihiwa 1992:76.
[14] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 379; Malo 29. This took place in October or, more likely, November 1819.
[15] *PMH* July 1820, 16, 7, p. 335. Marshall 2011: 175 objects to the language of abolition.

It was those who apparently had the most to lose by this change who effected it – and did so, moreover, without expecting any potential recompense from Christianity. They exchanged their old cultic vessels for an exercise of power unmoored from religious anchorage altogether.[16] One consequence, for example, is that 'religious diplomacy', so important in most other cases, is here far less relevant.

After describing the factional manoeuvres that led to the abolition, this chapter must therefore explain the dissolution of the chiefly cult in terms of the other two dimensions of the model of ruler conversion. That means firstly reflecting on how the indigenous system was weakened in its ability to retain 'conceptual control' over the interpretation of empirical events, thereby forfeiting some of its social power, and secondly considering how abolition issued from certain problems resulting from the attempt to establish statehood across an expanded domain, control the religious field and manage divinised kingship in a time of peace.

The course of events in Hawaii is exceptional in several ways; the disaggregation of abolition and conversion is possibly unmatched in the historical record. Yet it is precisely for this reason that it can offer a striking illumination of the potential tensions in divinised kingship, particularly as revealed in the transition from chieftaincies to statehood and as they were brought to the surface by the rapid changes attendant on contact with the outside world. Across Polynesia, certainly, there is a clear association between the attempt to forge a more monarchical or centralised form of government and vertically cascading conversions.[17] It is the task of Chapter 8 to explore how the resulting vacuum pulled in Christianity to serve social and political functions that the old system had either discharged or failed to discharge.

The Rise of the Aristocracy and the King

The four major islands of Hawaii hosted a much larger population (perhaps 400,000) than any other island group in Polynesia and had each produced a more firmly hierarchical organisation. The higher chiefs already held considerable ability to corral and redistribute

[16] It has attracted much theoretical reflection: Redfield 1953: 128–30; Kroeber 1948: 403–5; Webb 1965: 23; Davenport 1969; Levin 1968: 402–3; Fischer 1970: 163.

[17] Piggin and Davidson 2006: 551.

resources by the time Captain James Cook arrived in 1778 to inaugurate contact with the world outside the Pacific.[18] Patrick Kirch has argued that the archaeological record read alongside later accounts of Hawaiian oral traditions indicates a transition from chiefdoms to a set of archaic states, emerging in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. This involved a certain repudiation of kinship relations as the organisational matrix of non-elite society.[19] Most importantly, land tenure was no longer in the hands of lineage-based groups but was dominated by a chiefly elite – the *ali'i* – who held their land rights as a gift from the paramount chief.[20] One consequence of the elevation of the *ali'i* class, however subject within itself to multiple gradations, was a new identity for the broad mass of the population left behind. They now became 'commoners' defined by their *lack* of genealogy (beyond two generations) – and all the political, social and ritual claims that genealogy tends to endorse.[21] But in Hawaii, the effects of this great societal sundering were played out on a larger scale; Kirch sees it as part of a revolution encompassing the rise of divinised kings (with the Hawaiian titles of *ali'i nui* or *mō'ī*) sustained by a full-time body of warriors, substantial powers of economic redistribution, an intensified courtly culture and an organised system of state cult and temple maintenance.[22]

Hawaiian rulership, as incipient as it was, represents a rather pure example of divinised kingship, as explored in *Unearthly Powers*, and encompassed both heroic and cosmic dimensions in a somewhat unstable form. The Hawaiian intellectual and high-born contemporary of Liholiho, David Malo, noted that the efforts of kings to produce offspring were a matter of religious ritual: 'Worship was paid to the gods because it was firmly believed that the genius, power and inspiration (*mana*) of a king was like that of a god.'[23] Another translation of *mana* is simply sheer immanent power.[24] Here, as in every case, there has been some disagreement over the extent to which what was evidently, at least, a very 'deep metaphor' associating chiefs and *akua* ('deities') went 'beyond metaphor' to substantial claims of

[18] Kirch 2010: 130. [19] Kirch 2010: 102. [20] Kirch 2010: 12.
[21] Ralston 1984: 22–3. [22] Kirch 2010: 6, 39.
[23] Malo 135, and note Sahlins 1995: 127–9. The *Mo'olelo Hawaii* is a complex text, amended by Sheldon Dibble: See discussion in Valeri 1985: xxiv.
[24] Hocart 1914.

equivalence.[25] It may be that this distinction was largely irrelevant in emic terms. Evidently, sacrality was a profoundly embodied quality and one that was considered a matter of degree. The importance of genealogy was explicitly related to proximity to divinity, with the most noble bloodlines tracing the most direct descent from the *akua*.[26] Chiefs of very high status were surrounded with the *kapu* requisite for approaching sacred beings. Wrapping and marking the chiefly body with bark-cloth, tattoos, and feather cloaks did not merely symbolise divine potency but helped create it, at once harnessing *mana* and protecting the world from its unleashing.[27]

As the most crucial interlocutor with the gods, conducting the rituals most fundamental to the flourishing of the community they stood in for, *ali'i nui* inhabited a classic form of *cosmic kingship*. In Valerio Valeri's analysis of the Hawaiian system of human sacrifice, the king is 'the head of the cult, the supreme sacrificer, the man closest to the divine', which is a more sophisticated expression of what many European observers noted in the first generations of contact.[28] His position at the head of an organised hierarchy of temples is evident in his role in re-consecrating temples during the calendrical ritual cycle.[29]

This was not an office idealised in moral terms: High chiefs, like the gods whose influence they channelled, remained a source of morally undifferentiated potency.[30] In Valeri's analysis, kings are the ultimate punishers of transgression and themselves the greatest of transgressors.[31] The historiography of Hawaii varies in placing its emphasis on either an ideology of fearful elite ascendancy or one of idealised societal reciprocity.[32] The histories produced by first-generation convert Hawaiians themselves convey a strong sense of the king's responsibility towards his people and argue that a careless approach to the

[25] See *UP* 161 on these terms, and Charlot 1987 versus Valeri 1985 for debate.
[26] Malo 54: Chiefs who were the offspring of brother-sister marriages were 'called *akua*, divine'.
[27] Hooper 2006: 36.
[28] Valeri 1985: 140–1, 187–8; Mykkänen 2003: 27–8; compare Dibble 94; Bingham 20; Corney 1896: 103.
[29] Such features make Hawaii an archetypal archaic state for Kirch 2010, and for Bellah 2011: 207.
[30] Valeri 1985: 151. [31] Valeri 1985: 164–71, 348.
[32] Thomas 2010: 76 on Machiavellian versus romanticised perceptions of Hawaiian kingship; Ralston 1985: 24–5 on reciprocity.

performance of religious duties could forfeit his legitimacy.[33] But, in a sense, the whole annual ritual cycle culminating in the Makahiki rites was predicated on an attempt to describe and explain the oscillation between protective and violent sovereignty.[34] There is no final resolution to the struggle between external aggression (associated with the war god Kū) and communal flourishing (associated with the fertility god Lono), merely a narrative movement annually recounted.

The same quality of flux attended the generation of legitimacy. The principle of genealogical purity worked to routinise and stabilise the operation of *mana* to some extent.[35] But *mana* was not only heritable; it was also something proven through demonstrable success. Operating in tandem, these two qualities of *mana* lent the system a certain flexibility, so that it could balance the maintenance of hierarchy with a degree of healthy competition. But both also served to legitimise usurpation. The genealogical element diffused the nimbus of divinisation among many chiefly lines. Rulers could adopt various marital strategies, including incestuous ones, to render themselves and their offspring the most high-ranking, but they could never deny that rivals might also hold impressive claims.[36] In that sense, the ideology of kingship had not quite broken free from a broader strategy of *ali'i* distinction. The empirical quality, moreover, was the source of an ever-present threat to established authority, less arbitrating the ebb and flow of political fortune than following it, endorsing aggressive rebels and toppling unlucky incumbents.[37] This was the *heroic* dimension to Hawaiian kingship. Moreover, the vast responsibilities accorded to the king meant that all sorts of misfortune might be placed at his feet.[38]

The rapid development of contact with Europeans and Americans following Cook's arrival did not initially take the form of colonialism, which only loomed on the horizon from the mid-century, but it had obvious implications for the pursuit of indigenous ambition. It was through the skilful exploitation of the opportunities brought by trading

[33] Malo 53–65, 190–5, 244–5; ʻIʻī 129; compare Bingham 26, 74, and Dampier 1971: 48. According to Ellis 60, Kamehameha won some popularity by appeasing Pele through the sacrifice of his own hair.
[34] Davenport 1969: 8. [35] Kirch 2010: 203.
[36] Davenport 1969: 7; Bellah 2011: 204.
[37] As chiefs were defeated so were the particular forms of gods with which they were associated: Davenport 1969: 7.
[38] Mykkänen 2003: 2.

ships that the conquering hero Kamehameha – 'Napoleon of the Pacific' was one epithet – could subdue the kings of all the islands of Hawaii and bring them under a single rule for the first time.[39] In pre-contact Hawaii, the accumulation of wealth had been limited by the fact that foodstuffs remained the principal value (with the important exceptions of tapa cloth, carved items and featherwork) and a perishable one at that, so that their worth was only realised through rapid redistribution. Maritime trade now made possible many more ways to hoard wealth and to flaunt it. From 1786, trading ships plying the fur trade route between the Northwest Coast and China came to rely on provisions such as pork, salt and sugarcane provided by the Sandwich Islands. Kamehameha did not quite monopolise the foreign trade, but he was able to channel the lion's share of its benefits to his own aggrandisement, assembling an array of armaments and a genuine fleet of European vessels, while he began to take payments in Mexican dollars.[40] A further economic transition occurred from 1812, when it became clear that great profits could be made from exporting sandalwood bound for China and that these profits could be expended on a rapidly mounting desire for Western finery. The common people were now put to work cutting sandalwood in the mountains. A sense of how firmly Kamehameha had grasped the new world is indicated by the fact that in 1817, he was able to send a vessel built in his own royal naval yards to China to sell sandalwood.[41]

Kamehameha realised that he had to innovate in order to retain control of the *ali'i* class in these conditions, and, by the end of his reign in 1819, he had brought Hawaiian politics more closely to the loose notions of 'statehood' and 'monarchy' entertained by many scholars.[42] Governors (*kuhina*) were appointed who operated to one side of the land-holding chiefs and who were charged with the collection of taxes, while the more influential chiefs were required to live at court rather than in their own lands.[43]

[39] Ellis 385; I'i, 69, 79; Kamakau 2022: 213.
[40] Corney 1896: 98; Franchêre 1854: 61 (who does mention monopoly); Kotzebue 1830: 191; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: ch. 2; Ralston 1984: 24.
[41] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 60.
[42] Bellah 2011: 198–209 endorses Kirch here, comparing the Hawaiian 'kingdoms' to Lawrence Krader's definition of a state as a 'secondary formation' or Max Weber's 'patrimonial state'; Thomas 2010: 74.
[43] Levin 1968: 420.

But the forces he had harnessed also served to distance the chiefly class as a whole from the commoners in new ways and to excite their own ambitions. He could not stop other chiefs acquiring their own trade relations and their own stores of gunpowder weapons and followers.[44] Nor was it merely wealth that the *ali'i* sought. The politics of cultural glamour were particularly important in Hawaii, as in many of the island societies of Oceania, because of the strength of pre-existing associations between divinity, potency, sovereignty and foreignness.[45] These could not but shape the way Hawaiians received the extravagantly foreign Europeans and Americans. Across the Pacific, the advent of Cook and the sovereign, King George, whom he represented, was seen as an event of mythic force with which ruling dynasties were keen to associate themselves.[46] Cook's arrival in Hawaii in 1778 during the Makahiki rites appears to have been creatively interpreted by some parties as a manifestation of the god Lono himself – at any rate, he became as such when he died.[47] The mystique around Kahiki or Tahiti played a role here. It betokened the old ancestral lands to the south but also the horizon itself, the source of godlike heroes, mythological happenings and new cults. If whites were first associated with this realm, then the same structure notably enhanced the prestige surrounding the actual Tahitians who, in 1822, brought accounts of the conversion of Pomare II, an event that had a decisive impact, as we shall see in Chapter 8.[48]

Indeed, the chiefs explicitly conceived themselves as 'foreign' in status in relation to the common mass – as stranger-kings, in the

[44] Kamakau 2022: 347.

[45] Thomas 1991: 108, 117, 265; Hooper 2006: 35, 41; Linnekin 1990: 91. There is an echo of this in Kongo pp. 56–7.

[46] Sahlins 2012; Thomas 2010: 55; Davies 1961: xli.

[47] This issue has attracted too much controversy for full citation, except the central statements of Sahlins 1985; 1995; Obeyesekere 1992. See pp. 52–6 on the case of Kongo.

[48] The earliest missionary reports from Hawaii are emphatic on the importance of the Tahitian example: *PMH* July 1820, 16, 7, p. 336; December 1820, 16, 12, p. 570; 'Account of Keopuolani', CWM/LMS, South Seas; Ellis to Bruder, 26 May 1823, CWM/LMS, South Seas; Ellis 41–3, 94, 127, 357; Mathison 1825: 433; Bingham 135, 161–2, 178, 18; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 418. Also Barrère 1989; Barrère and Sahlins 1979; Mykkänen 2003: 203, fn. 19; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 89, fn. 16; and Chang 2017: 13–16, ch. 3. Against are Dibble 142; Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 80. Note Pomare's own perspective had been broadened by the Hawaiians in his entourage, including one who had been to England: Thomas 2010: 99.

terminology of Marshall Sahlins. They were pre-disposed to identify with the foreigners and therefore to acquire their material trappings.[49] Moreover, the traditional means of exhibiting their *mana* on the battlefield had been closed off, and it now found other avenues for display, fully in tune with traditional understandings of chiefly bodily magnificence.[50] The 'princely' British hat worn by Liholiho was far from exceptional; chiefs were rapidly assimilating elements of Western dress while feather cloaks were beginning to decline in significance.[51] The appetite for all things foreign seemed to know no bounds.[52]

Chiefly Factions and Female Agency

In his attempt to maintain control, Kamehameha appointed his own men, Hawai'i island chiefs, to governorships of the other islands. He overlooked his brothers and closest relatives, who could boast of a correspondingly high rank that might be translated into rivalry, and rather turned to more low-born men or more recent relatives by marriage.[53] In later years in particular, he came to depend upon the relations of his recent wife Ka'ahumanu. The group became known as 'Ka'ahumanu's people'. Among them were her father Ke'eaumoku, her brothers Kahekili Ke'eaumoku (also known as 'George Cox') and Kuakini ('John Adams') and her collateral brothers Kalanimoku (aka 'William Pitt') and Boki.[54] They all acquired extensive autonomy in their personal domains and built up large estates.[55] Kamehameha had been resident in O'ahu, the third largest island, since 1795, when he had conquered it with the aid of British musket and cannon, and it became the main trading centre of the archipelago. But in 1812 he left it to take up residence in Kailua on Hawai'i Island. It was Ka'ahumanu's people and his white subjects who were placed in

[49] And affected sexual relations: Sahlins 1985: 1–31; Thomas 1991: 91–2.
[50] Sahlins 1985: 140–1; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 77; Kirch 2010 182–3.
[51] Linnekin 1990: 54.
[52] ʻĪʻī 87, 103; Kotzebue 1821: 252; Dampier 1971: 36; Dibble 1839: 73; Bingham 109, 170.
[53] Kamakau 2022: 309.
[54] Sahlins 1981: 48. On nicknames: *PMH* July 1820, 16, 7, p. 335; Franchêre 1854: 62.
[55] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 2, 57.

charge of affairs in O‘ahu and took on more and more of the practical business of government.[56]

One of the many ways in which Ka‘ahumanu consolidated her own position was by becoming the foster mother of the heir, Liholiho.[57] But she was fast becoming Liholiho’s rival too. In the latter phase of Kamehameha’s reign, there were rumblings that the greater *ali‘i* were intent on rebellion and that his formidable wife was at the heart of the trouble.[58] Kotzebue predicted that, ‘His kingdom, founded and kept together by force, will fall to pieces, the partition of it being already decided upon and prepared.’[59]

Liholiho and Ka‘ahumanu were not equal partners in the abolition plot. Western sources may fix their gaze on the masculine agency of the king, but in reality the young king was given little room for manoeuvre by the operations of Ka‘ahumanu.[60] She and other high-ranking women had already signalled their intention to break the eating *kapu* and now proposed that he publicly side with them. To resist would mean throwing down the gauntlet to his classificatory mother and his biological mother (Keōpūolani), potentially insisting on their death. No wonder Liholiho hesitated. But once he had made his decision, his authority was doomed. The political dispensation that materialised with the abolition was a curtailment of monarchical supremacy: The king was forced to sign an agreement ending his claims to a monopoly on sandalwood, and he forwent his right to redistribute land. The French naval captain Louis Freycinet, who visited soon afterwards, ‘perceived that the authority of the young King was but poorly established and that his wishes were frequently balked by some of his principal chiefs of the island, more inclined to oppose the King than to render obedience’.[61] There had been an oligarchic power grab.

[56] Kotzebue 1821: 240–1 on Kalanimoku’s role.
[57] Kame‘eleihiwa 1992: 70–4.
[58] ‘Ī‘ī 50, dates enmity back to at least 1809 when Kamehameha discovered her adulterous relations with one of his nephews who he then had executed – and tellingly says that she considered then trying to place Liholiho on the throne; also Kamakau 2022: 335; Bingham 77–8; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 60.
[59] Kotzebue 1821: 240. On the old king’s death, the queen’s people were suspected of sorcery (Dibble 84).
[60] Kotzebue 1830: 198. See the compelling reconstruction of the interests involved in the abolition by Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa (1992: 77–8); also Harfst 1972: 438.
[61] Freycinet 1978: 19.

But this was part of a broader centralisation of power.[62] On other islands across the Pacific, the successful warrior-unifiers (Pomare II of Tahiti, Tāufa'āhau of Tonga and Cakobau of Fiji) had been the contenders most deeply involved with foreign powers, and who ultimately converted; in the case of Hawaii, the equivalent figure (Kamehameha) was superseded by an even more radically Westernising faction amongst his most powerful supporters.[63] This faction rode the second wave of economic transition and would bring Hawaii into line with the cultural revolutions elsewhere in Polynesia. The abolition, and indeed the subsequent period between 1819 and 1825, can be interpreted in the light of a struggle between the monarch and Ka'ahumanu's people for true mastery.

But if the abolition was an oligarchic seizure of power, why is it that the initial instigators included a range of elite women and not just Ka'ahumanu's people? These included Liholiho's biological mother Keōpūolani, the highest-ranking female chief in genealogical terms, who took the most dangerous step in choosing to eat with his younger brother Kauikeaouli and one of his wives.[64] The question of gender relations has to take centre stage. The roles played by Hawaiian women, and the symbols and images that clustered around them, were much too multivalent, variable and subtle to be summarised in blanket terms.[65] But the main point, as Jocelyn Linnekin puts it, concerns 'a contradiction between the ritual status of Hawaiian women and their efficacy in temporal (including jural) affairs'.[66]

The very fact that women were in a position to effect a revolution in this manner indicates that in one sense they enjoyed considerable freedom to accumulate status and power. Gender was partially trumped by the tremendous significance of genealogy: In some ways female *ali'i* were chiefs before they were women and could acquire personal property, lands and followers in their own right, as well as

[62] The rebellion by Kekuaokalani, which followed soon afterwards, also sought to destroy the resident Europeans because they 'had contributed the most to bring them under subjection and to bring about the concentration of power in the hands of one person'. Freycinet 1978: 20; Sahlins 1981: 64.

[63] The income, offices and predilections of Ka'ahumanu's people placed them closest to Western influence.

[64] Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 76; Linnekin 1990: 70.

[65] See Linnekin 1990; Valeri 1985; receiving a plausible resolution in Hooper 2006: 38.

[66] Linnekin 1990:6, also 24, 184. And see the discussion in Ortner 1990.

strike deals with traders.[67] The *mana* that their genealogical rank conferred on offspring meant that marriage strategies, often orchestrated by senior women, were a crucial tool of political aspiration.[68]

Nevertheless, men were far more prevalent as ritual and political office-holders, and this was surely in turn connected with their exclusive rights to the major temple rituals. Above all, women could not conduct sacrifices in the manner of a paramount chief or gain the *mana* thereby generated.[69] When the chiefs and priests were conducting their rites, women were not allowed within forty yards.[70] Certain prestigious foods (such as pork, varieties of coconuts and bananas) used for sacrificial offerings to the principal four gods were denied to women. Men had to eat separately because every meal they ate was a form of sacrifice to the gods.[71] There were brutal penalties for breaking the eating tabu (*ai kapu)*.[72] When most of Kamehameha's army were wiped out by yellow fever just before he intended to invade Kaua'i in 1804, three men who had been found guilty of eating coconuts with Ka'ahumanu were found, their limbs were broken and their eyes scooped out.[73] Western observers, at least, focussed on the *ai kapu* as a form of degradation.[74]

Whatever status women enjoyed in other domains of life, the elaboration of the state cult served to protect male authority.[75] Why should the mere breaking of the *ai kapu* have exploded the whole sanctified order? It is as if gender hierarchy stood at the root of all other hierarchies.[76] And once the *kapu* was broken, the effect was to advance not only Ka'ahumanu but female chiefs in general, who often seemed the most active and authoritative figures in the dynasty that followed.[77] But how could the abolitionists come to disregard the

[67] Linnekin 1990: 56. [68] Linnekin 1990: 58, 63.
[69] Linnekin 1990: 28. Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 79–80 points to a few women who had achieved the highest offices. Keākealaniwahine was permitted to make sacrifices but not to eat with the men ('Ī'ī 159–60). Valeri 1985: 113–14: 'Men's superiority to women, then, expresses only the superiority of a sacrificial relationship with the gods over a purely genealogical relationship.'
[70] Corney 1896: 100–1. [71] Sahlins 1981: 46.
[72] Malo 28. Thurston (1882: 71) describes meeting an eight-year-old girl whose eye had been scooped out for eating a banana.
[73] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 423.
[74] Ellis 126, 303, 390; Bingham 20, 52, 78; Kotzebue 1830: 178.
[75] Linnekin 1990: 35; Kashay 2008: 22, 32.
[76] Valeri 1985: 128; O'Connor 2008: 154–9. [77] Valeri 1985: 128.

awful consequences that were believed to follow such reckless transgression?[78]

Kapu, Victory and Disconfirmation

As many historians have pointed out, Liholiho's act in August 1819 may have been profoundly shocking, but it came after the eating *kapu* had been showing signs of strain for some time. This relates to one of the most remarkable features of the Hawaiian case: Not only were abolition and conversion disaggregated, but so also, to some extent, were the empirical disconfirmation of the immanent power of the old religion and the confirmation of the corresponding claims to Christianity. Thus we are afforded a view as to how exposure to the secular dimension of European expansion may erode the hold of an immanentist system before any contact with missionaries.[79] Here the conceptual control afforded by the *kapu* system increasingly seemed unable to cope with the interactions with foreigners; its very holism proved its undoing.

Kapu (tabu) was used in at least three ways: to establish very general principles of society, such as the *ai kapu*; to establish the appropriate behaviour to be adopted in the presence of people of superior rank; and to deliver particular decisions or edicts of government.[80] The force of divine sanction was invoked by all. Sahlins has brought out most clearly the ways in which the third usage underwent a sudden expansion in the post-contact period in order to serve the interests of chiefs intent on profiting from European trade. More and more, then, *kapu* was used as a vehicle for specific acts of naked accumulation, and its role as part of an established ritual order of reciprocity began to recede.[81] The concept of *kapu* changed from signifying things set apart from the god to becoming 'the sign of a material and proprietary right'; such restrictions were no longer borne for the sake of broader communal flourishing.[82] Just as economic relations with the West were exacerbating the 'foreignness' of the chiefs in terms of their material appearance, so it now was alienating them from commoners in terms of the circulation of material bounty.

[78] Webb 1965: 25; Kuper 1999: 189; Levin 1968: 427 argue that the gender contradiction is not sufficient, but it is surely vital.

[79] Although, probably crucially, there was some awareness of Christianity pre-1819; see below.

[80] Davenport 1969: 8–9. [81] Sahlins 1981: 44–5. [82] Sahlins 1985: 142–3.

In the absence of other mechanisms for enforcing the respect of property rights, *kapu* was highly effective.[83] But if religion is a Durkheimian veil that society uses to hide its own inner workings from view, that veil was now looking a little moth-eaten, and those inner workings were increasingly inviting scrutiny. As for visiting Europeans, they acted as if it simply didn't exist.[84] It has been argued that as foreigners Europeans were classed as outside the *kapu* system, so their antics would not have threatened its integrity.[85] But this is certainly to underplay their interaction with the *kapu* system as a whole. For example, their behaviour sometimes struck directly at the chiefly dignity that the old system had been so careful to burnish, as when Captain Clerke slapped the high chief Kāneoneo on the back on board the *Discovery*.[86] More importantly, they induced Hawaiians to break *kapu*, flocking to the seas to trade with their ships – even when all such maritime travel was tabued – or neglecting the priority of their chief in leading such canoe traffic.[87]

From the earliest encounters, women were among the most determined of *kapu*-breakers, particularly in their eagerness to come aboard ship in defiance of prohibitions against seaborne travel.[88] In seeking sexual encounters they were apparently drawn in at first by the desire to acquire foreign *mana* for their offspring and later more financial forms of recompense.[89] Once aboard, they found a world in which the meaning of *kapu* was suddenly insubstantial – a floating alternative reality simulator that would slowly relativise the authority of cultural forms onshore. Here they could feast on pork.[90] The more such transgressions went un-punished by the gods, the more the reality of their threat would have diminished.[91] There is some evidence that aspects of the *kapu* system became more sporadically enforced during the latter phase of Kamehameha's reign.[92]

[83] Sahlins 1981: 45. [84] Dibble 143–5; Kashay 2008: 23.
[85] Webb 1965: 265–6; Kuper 1999: 189, contra older historiography (Daws 1968: 57–8; Davenport 1969: 14) as well as Sahlins.
[86] Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 67.
[87] Sahlins 1981: 36, 46; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 443.
[88] Sahlins 1981: 46–55; Linnekin 1990: 19–23; Daws 1968: 57.
[89] Sahlins 1985: ch. 1; Linnekin 1990: 56–6, 61; Kashay 2008: 21.
[90] On female infractions, see Freycinet 1978: 2; Kotzebue 1821: 249–50; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 443; Dibble 46, 147.
[91] Note Sahlins 1981: 47 implies that women were not subject to divine sanction; it was human sanction that was less reliably forthcoming here.
[92] Kashay 2008: 23; Linnekin 1990: 20; Valeri 1985: 364, fn. 8.

While foreign ships exerted a magnetic pull against the force of the *kapu*, there were more general and terrible ways in which the old order could be called into question. Hawaii was not spared the demographic assault that afflicted other Polynesian islands coming into contact with foreign diseases, many of them sexually transmitted. By 1830 its population had been reduced to less than half its size at the moment of contact.[93] The existing ritual order shaped up to confront the new threat.[94] Hawaiian historian John Papa ʻĪʻī, one of the first generation of young aristocrats to receive a missionary education, has described the particular emphasis placed on training promising members of the court as healing *kahuna*s after a terrible epidemic in 1806.[95] But they must have suffered countless reverses. Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa has argued that these inevitable failures had a major impact by undermining Hawaiian trust in the existing deities, particularly since *kapu*-breaking whites appeared not to suffer.[96] Furthermore, this struck at the heart of Kamehameha's divinisation, damaging his claims to cosmological efficacy.[97] A prophecy supposedly uttered in 1812 by the priest Kapihe to Kamehameha may be considered in this light:

> The islands will be joined. The ancestors will live. The things that belong above of the sky will descend here below. The things that belong here below will rise up above in the sky. The water will be sprinkled forth. The fan will fan forth. The sick of today will recover.[98]

[93] From circa 400,000 to circa 130,000 according to Kirch 2010: 130. See also Dibble 1839: 43; Bingham 42, 52; and Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 4.

[94] Malo 107.

[95] ʻĪʻī 46–7, which also has a tale about men from Kahiki ('they were all like gods, it was said'), who arrived in Hawaii and spread fatal diseases among the chiefs and commoners.

[96] Kameʻeleihiwa 1992: 79–82, followed by Kashay 2008: 24, 31; and see Silva 2004: 24–7. Shortly before publication I discovered that Archer 2018 has substantially developed this insight about the significance of disease and underlined the scale of the losses among the *aliʻi*. I have not attempted to cite this further evidence but take it to amplify the argument about disconfirmation made here. See *UP* 275–81 on this theme for the conversion of Tahiti, Tonga and Fiji.

[97] On the connection between corrupt government and divine displeasure through pestilence: Malo 244–5. Intriguingly, Liholiho may have been particularly associated with healing rites before accession: Valeri 1982: 28–9.

[98] Charlot 2004: 375 dates the earliest recorded version to Gideon Laʻanui's reminiscences and translates from *Ke Kumu Hawaii*, March 1838. A similar translation appeared in *The Hawaiian Annual for 1830*, p. 92. Laʻauni comments: 'The islands did not join; ancestors were not revived. That ends it.'

Kamakau also reported a version of this prophecy, which he interpreted as predicting the fall of the *kapu*, a kind of 'world turned upside down', and the subsequent raising up of the Christians.[99] However, in the earlier version of the prophecy, it seems that what was being expressed was a certain dissatisfaction with Kamehameha's reign (a rare thing in the historical record), which derived from the distressing inability of Hawaiian healing practices to deal with the foreign disease. Here it is predicted that the water and the fan – referring to traditional aspects of treatment – will be efficacious again. But this is evidently one aspect of a more general vision of societal restoration, involving the full unification of the islands and a newly efficacious relationship with the sphere of the metapersons: The ancestors will take on a new physical form to bestow their blessings. Sovereignty, divinity, cosmology and bodily health are all rolled into one here. This is a clue that the conjuncture of contact had produced the sense of crisis and the prophetic or millenarian response that we see in so many other parts of the world.[100]

Despite the absence of missionaries, there would have been some dim awareness of Christianity. The English Captain George Vancouver visited Hawaii three times between 1792 and 1795 and made a considerable impact on Kamehameha in particular; in fact, the latter was induced to 'cede' Hawai'i Island to Britain. There are reports that Vancouver made some effort to urge his faith upon the Hawaiian king.[101] By 1798 a story was doing the rounds that Kamehameha had responded by saying that he would go with him to the high mountain Mauna Loa, 'and they would both jump off together, each calling on their separate gods for protection, and if Capt. Vancouver's god saved him, but himself was not saved by his god, then people should believe as Capt. Vancouver did'.[102] Sahlins has already emphasised the significance of this story ('it succinctly encodes the entire Hawaiian theory of the European presence') and the way in which it is a re-telling of a much older story about the coming of Pā'ao. Pā'ao was another visitor from the beyond who had come to Hawaii and brought with him a new kind of cult (dedicated to Kūkā'ilimoku) and

[99] Kamakau 2022: 413. [100] See *UP* ch. 4.
[101] Dibble 47; Bingham, 45; 'Ī'ī 106, 139.
[102] Meares 1916: 26–7; Sahlins 1981: 9.

indeed the first temples of human sacrifice. This was seen as something abrupt, even akin to conversion.[103]

These stories reveal how religious change was structured in the immanentist mentality, and therefore the manner in which Christianity was received: as something amenable to empirical test.[104] But note that in the contest between Kamehameha and Vancouver, it is the former who challenges the latter, confident in the efficacy of his gods. A different account of Kamehameha's response to Vancouver's efforts is provided by Kamakau, but the underlying confidence is the same. He says, 'These are my gods, they are powerful beings with *mana* (*he mau akua mana)* who have helped me acquire this kingdom, and from this comes my reign.' It is perhaps that simple: The local gods had been good to him.[105] Unlike those state-builders of the Pacific who converted, he had not been fundamentally thwarted in his accumulation of power.[106] He met Vancouver as the unifier of Hawai'i Island and in the next year he would successfully invade Maui and O'ahu. This is surely a major reason why in Hawaii the question of conversion was deferred to the next generation.

There are one or two signs that the immanentist proposition could become vulnerable to the touch of relativism as Hawaiians learned more about the wider world. Joseph Banks (named after the botanist of Captain Cook's expedition), who had commanded a schooner and been to China, was reported to have argued with a priest who asserted that, if the temples were forsaken, there would be no rain. He replied,

> In England and America, there are no idols, no tabus – yet there is plenty of rain there and fine crops too. In Tahiti and Huahine they have broken the tabus and destroyed the idols and worship the God of the white men – yet the rain falls there, and the fruits grow as abundantly as ever.[107]

[103] Sahlins 1981: 25. For Kirch 2010: 86, the Pā'ao stories originated in the last real wave of influence from long-distance seafaring in the fourteenth century.

[104] Some later versions of Pā'ao's story (Ellis 392–3) render him a white man, underlying the local conceptualisation of the advent of Christianity as equivalent to that of the advent of sacrificial religion.

[105] Kamakau 2022: 299; 'Ī'ī 1890 [1841]: 160. Sahlins 1981: 10, fn. 2.

[106] *UP* 297.

[107] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 442–3. This is suspiciously close to missionary reasoning, but it fits with his sceptical attitude as recorded elsewhere (*MH* June 1821, 17, 6, p. 173; Bingham, 107).

One of Ka‘ahumanu’s people, Ke‘eaumoku Cox, made clear to Peter Corney in 1817 that he ‘sets the wooden gods and priests at defiance; he says that they are all liars, and that the white men’s God is the true and only God’.[108] ‘Truth’ here, surely signified efficacy. It would appear that some chiefs were inclined to translate the scepticism towards the native gods into a more favourable appraisal of Christianity. But it should be remembered that this was not what the abolition of 1819 effected, which was a kind of secularisation rather than conversion.[109] In the absence of missionaries the underlying dynamic was revealed as a crumbling away of the old system rather than the victory march of the new.

It is unlikely that Kamehameha himself shared in these doubts.[110] When the time came for his final illness, and his devotions to his feathered god Kūkā‘ilimoku had failed, he was willing to make a trial of the powers of a bird god Pua, for whom two houses were then built.[111]

Kamehameha’s death provided an opening for change – and not simply by removing such an authoritative defender of the old regime. Where strong forms of cosmic kingship have developed, a royal death is likely to be understood as a suspension of the normal principles of cosmic order, and such is what we find in Hawaii.[112] When free-eating began then in 1819, it began in a period of *licensed* misrule: It has been observed that Liholiho and Ka‘humanu merely prolonged this period indefinitely, widening a breach in the system that appeared at every chiefly death.[113] The existential crisis that followed Kamehameha’s death may have been particularly acute because of the heroic

[108] Corney 1896: 101; also *PMH* July 1820, 16, 7, p. 336; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 85; Sahlins 1981: 62–3.

[109] Kashay 2008 makes ‘secularism’ a conscious ideological option, represented by the rambunctious world of beachcombers, merchants and sailors, (deplored by the likes of Kotzebue 1830: 199 as well as missionaries), which may be going too far.

[110] Although early reports from missionaries claimed that he had acquired a certain scepticism towards the end. See *PMH* July 1820, 16, 7, p. 335; *MH* June 1821, 17, 6, p. 173. On his adhesion to old ways: Kotzebue 1830: 209.

[111] Dibble 80–1.

[112] See *UP* 172–3; Corney 1896: 86; Freycinet 1978: 76; Dibble 84; Dibble 1839: 62; and Ellis 1832: 177.

[113] Kamakau 2022: 409–13; Sahlins 1981: 65; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 69; Davenport 1969: 10, 15–18; Linnekin 1990: 70; Kashay 2008: 25. The journal of Marin is typically blunt: ‘9 may – this day all the women and men, even the royal family went to commit fornication with one another’ (Gast and Conrad, eds. 2002: 230).

dimension too: He had been no ordinary chief but one who had achieved unparalleled things and had been marked out by his gods with such favour. Moreover, the death of a paramount chief was rarely seen as purely a natural event, and Kamehameha's was no exception, as the rumours of sorcery testified.[114] The shield of supernatural power surrounding him had been punctured by an insidious malignancy. Certainly, Kamehameha's recourse to different gods on his deathbed had failed, as in the end all such gods of healing must. Hiram Bingham tells us explicitly that when Liholiho set his foot on the necks of the gods of Hawaii, he accused them of 'impotency or neglect, in not recovering his sick father'.[115]

The breaking of the eating *kapu* – or the refusal to reinstate it – in August 1819 was made possible by a declining awe for the powers of the old gods among certain members of the elite. But it also functioned as the most extraordinary act of public disconfirmation. Any expectations that the gods would retaliate were disappointed.[116]

But what of mortal revenge? We have seen that with every type of sacred monarchy, the event of its abolition (nearly always through conversion) generates a counter-action in the name of the old order.[117] While Liholiho was undergoing his doomed preparations in Kawaihae, he had been accompanied by another high-ranking chief, Kekuaokalani. In fact, both had acceded through a diarchic division of formal authority: Liholiho would take the principal role, which involved the right to consecrate the temples of human sacrifices and conduct their rites. But Kamehameha gave the guardianship of his personal war god Kūkā'ilimoku to his favourite nephew Kekuaokalani. Kamehameha was no doubt balancing factional interests in giving such a role to one of his collateral relatives, but he was also reproducing a structure of the long term that entrenched the potential for usurpation in the very act of succession. Kūkā'ilimoku

[114] Compare Njinga of Ndongo in *UP* 312.

[115] Bingham 77. 'The death of Kamehameha, their popular and powerful sovereign, whether it was regarded as the result of the neglect or impotency of the gods whom he had served, or the malice of others, was doubtless overruled to shake the superstitious confidence of those who supposed him an object of the peculiar favor of the Hawaiian deities.'

[116] Byron 1826: 47; Kotzebue 1830: 199; Dibble 1839: 65–6; Kamakau 2022: 409–15; 'Ī'ī 1890 [1841]: 161; Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 78.

[117] *UP* 288–91.

was the 'kingdom snatching god'.[118] Kekuaokalani immediately became the most obvious figure around which to rally any opposition to the abolition: He embodied the potency of the war god, after all, and his own status would be rendered meaningless by the abolition.[119] He gathered his supporters around him and met the king's forces, led by Kalanimoku, at the battle of Kuamo'o. There, Kekuaokalani was killed by a musket ball in his left breast and resistance petered away at the loss of the chief.[120] There was an apparently separate uprising of commoners at Hamakua, but this too was quickly crushed.[121]

As discussed at length in *Unearthly Powers*, historical accounts of 'Constantine moments', in which the powers of competing gods are decided by the outcome of battle, are frequently vulnerable to sceptical readings.[122] In this case, however, where the evidence is contemporary, unanimous and backed by the accounts of later Hawaiian authors, there has been no attempt to question the understanding that Kekuaokalani was fighting in the name of the war-god, the *kapu* and the cultic system that Liholiho had just attempted to jettison.[123] Furthermore, in this case, missionary sentiments were decidedly ambivalent about this event: Yes, it was wondrously facilitating, which might signal the hand of providence or the operation of remote prayers. On the other hand, it remained puzzling that this was not a battle fought for Christianity at all! The mission had not even arrived by the time the conflict took place. The resulting discomfort is particularly apparent in the narrative of Hiram Bingham. Any tendency to dramatise the occasion as a contest between the forces of light and darkness is undercut by his loathing for atheism.[124] The chiefly experiment begun in 1819 was seen as a kind of horrifying realisation of hitherto philosophical speculations about godless society. What Kalanimoku was fighting for in his eyes, then, was an unfettered indulgence of human appetite, as exemplified in the figure of the drunkard

[118] The implications of this diarchic structure will be considered in more detail below.
[119] However, it appears that two of the major priests involved were associated with Lono. Sahlins 1995: 259 emphasises opposition with the Kū-focussed royalty.
[120] Bingham 76; *MH* June 1821, 17, p. 176.
[121] Kamakau 2022: 429 implies that it was related to Kekuaokalani's revolt.
[122] *UP* ch. 5.
[123] Kamakau 2022: 429: Some priests urged Kekuaokalani to 'make a stand for the '*ai kapu*', for rulership was dependent on piety to the gods.
[124] Bingham 76–9, 87; Dibble 1839: 68; Ellis 128; Mykkänen 2003: 36.

Liholiho. Indeed, Bingham's report may be the origin of the modern interpretation that it was gunpowder that won the day, as a base but crudely effective replacement for the proper function of religion.[125]

There is little doubt that the missionary sources are correct to claim that the defeat suffered by Kekuaokalani was a massive blow to the credibility of his god and the tradition of warrior chieftaincy that it helped sustain.[126] The feathered god that had borne Kamehameha to victory had been brought crashing to the ground.[127] Bingham and Dibble yield the vital clue that it was this defeat which set off a more urgent popular participation in the destruction of cultic objects ordered by the king: 'Their rage towards idols by which they had been so long enthralled and who had now failed them in the day of battle was unbounded.'[128] This was undertaken so energetically that when Western visitors toured Hawaii in the early 1820s, they remarked on any edifices that had survived as notable exceptions.[129] These events are a most striking example of the capacity for auto-iconoclasm inherent in immanentist religiosity as a particularly drastic consequence of failure in the economy of ritual efficacy. As elsewhere in Polynesia and beyond, it was not so much the chief's own conversion but his spectacular victory in battle that unleashed widespread rejection of the old cults.

The State Cult and Its Frailties

But what was it that was abolished when Liholiho sent out his messengers across all the islands with orders for the temples to be brought down, the priesthoods disbanded and the idols toppled over?[130]

[125] Bingham 78; Marshall 2011: 27. Silva 2004: 29: 'Now it was clear to everyone that the old akua had little or no mana.'

[126] Dibble 157; Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 78.

[127] On the relationship between king and war god, see Ellis 98, 158; Malo 81, 159–60.

[128] Dibble 157; Dibble 1839: 68; Bingham 77; Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 82.

[129] Ellis 119, 164–9, 266.

[130] John Papa 'Ī'ī 157: 'Kaahumanu and her foster son, Kamehameha II [Liholiho], were those who did away with images, *lele* altars for sacrifices, *kuahu* altars for offerings, and *heiau*s and *luakini* (temples) throughout the six districts of Hawaii and all the islands to Kauai and Niihau.' See the earliest report received by missionaries in *PMH* July 1820, 16, 7, p. 336. Marin reports that the day after receiving the order, on 7 November, 'This day all the women ate pork and they burnt all the churches [temples] on the island' (Gast and Conrad, eds 2002: 233).

The short answer is that it was not religion *per se* but rather the public cults organised around the institution of sacred kingship, everything that made manifest the 'official' ideology of society and the magnification of chiefly, male power. It was the principal deities of this official ideology, the four major gods, who would now no longer be recognised.[131] There was even a certain consciousness that certain elements of this matrix (above all, the god Kūkā'ilimoku and human sacrifice) were not fixtures from time immemorial but importations from the foreign-derived chiefs in the time of Pā'ao.[132]

Hawaii therefore stands as an excellent example of the potential strengths and weaknesses of the consolidation of the religious field under the conditions of immanentism. On the one hand, the capacity of the ruling elite to impose a state cult on their subjects in which their authority was paramount is remarkable. Indeed, so much of the visible and public manifestation of religious life was dependent on this ideology: It was only chiefs, after all, who had the resources to build temples, maintain priests and feed the gods on a grand scale. On the other hand, all this only overlay a more general form of religiosity that could apparently survive without it.

Therefore, many other kinds of interactions with 'lesser' supernatural entities and their intermediaries were left unmolested by the abolition.[133] These included the *'amakua*, spirits associated with particular families and natural manifestations (or 'ancestral tutelary deities'), and this category even came to assimilate the overthrown gods to some extent.[134] Everyday family-based religious activity persisted; each man worshipped the deity (*akua*) associated with his occupation, David Malo tells us.[135] Many of the recurrent needs for divine intervention were met by specialists in sorcery, healing and divination.[136] Prophets, always figures of liminal frisson outside of the established priesthood, continued.[137] In their wanderings over the islands in the early 1820s, missionaries found remnants of even the

[131] These four (Kū, Lono, Kāne and Kanaloa) encompassed lesser deities, however: Valeri 1985: 109–10.
[132] Sahlins 1981: 11.
[133] Ellis 15–16, 38, 201, 287–8, 295, 350; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 73.
[134] Davenport 1969: 18; Johnson 2003: 342; Valeri 1985: 20–30, noting differences to classic ancestral cult.
[135] Malo 81. [136] Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 68; Ralston 1984: 30; Daws 1968: 59.
[137] Malo 114; Ellis 65; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 128; Valeri 1985: 138–40.

grander elements of the old religion persisting here and there. Undoubtedly, many of the idols had been hidden in anticipation of a future change rather than consigned to the flames.[138] Most notably they encountered the strength of the cult around Pele – of which more below. Euro-Americans certainly erred then when they suggested that the old religion in general had fallen, and that nothing was left but atheism.[139]

Vulnerabilities of Legitimacy

A further potential weakness lay in the capacity of the state cult to generate legitimacy through popular enthusiasm. Driven to elevate the *ali'i* through awe and mystique, its practice and doctrine were reserved for the latter, while commoners were left largely in the dark – outside of their moment of ritual ascendancy in the Makahiki.[140] Corney – perhaps reflecting a Protestant sentiment – remarked that 'the common people know nothing more about their religion than a stranger who never saw the islands. They pay the greatest respect to their chiefs and priests, and are kept in superstitious ignorance.'[141] Some European sources contend that the whole ritual edifice (of *kapu*, temple tribute payments, human sacrifices) was a burden on the general populace that was keenly resented as such. William Ellis recounts a conversation with a crowd in the village of Kapauku in July 1823:

> We asked them who was their god? They said they had no god; formerly they had many, but now they had cast them all away. We asked them if they had done well in abolishing them? They said, Yes, for the tabu occasioned much labour and inconvenience, and drained off the best of their property. We asked them if it was a good thing to have no god, and to know of no being to whom they ought to render religious homage? They said, perhaps it was, for they had nothing to provide for the great sacrifices, and were under no fear of punishment for breaking tabu; that now, one fire cooked their food, and men and women ate together the same kind of provisions.[142]

[138] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 376, 382, 451.
[139] Bingham 74, 77, 79.
[140] When it was the king and the priest who were kept confined: Sissons 2014: 24.
[141] Corney 1896: 101; Tyerman to Bruder, 10 August 1822, Oahoo, CWM/LMS, South Seas. See also further remarks in Sahlins 1981: 51; 1995: 121–2; Malo 82 on gods worshipped by people and not chiefs.
[142] Ellis 201, and see 204, 389–90.

Even if we grant the veracity of this sort of evidence, it is not straightforward to connect it with the abolition, which was handed down from on high.[143] Furthermore, on this matter most European sources are potentially treacherous insofar as they are insensible to the moral and communal dimensions of the old system.[144] They are at odds with the accounts left by indigenous Hawaiian sources, which, even after quite thoroughgoing Christianisation, clearly reflect the sense that the public cult was felt to be a matter of societal well-being.[145] Nevertheless, the global economic conjuncture was doing strange things to the operation of this system. The sandalwood trade reached a particular intensity in 1818–1819, as a distant effect of the financial crisis in America.[146] Chiefs chased the new opportunities by extracting more and more labour from the commoners through the traditional corvée arrangements, which jeopardised the normal flow of reciprocity.[147] At the same time, Caroline Ralston suggests that chiefs had become more likely to disregard commoners' interests because they no longer depended on their loyalties for military service.[148] So, even after setting aside predictable missionary ejaculations about the tyrannies of the old system, we may retain some sense that it was being pushed ever harder in the service of the elite and that commoners might perceive advantages in their condition following abolition.[149] Moreover, the chiefs themselves would gain from removing troublesome religious duties that ate up the labour of their commoners in an era when the productive capacities of the islands were being squeezed.[150]

[143] Commoners seem to have been largely acquiescent: Ralston 1984: 31, 36; Davenport 1969: 17.

[144] We must beware missionary legitimisations of post-conversion society and tropes of native tyranny: Mathison 1825: 385; Dampier 1971: 47; Franchêre 1854: 68; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 416; Dibble 90–7, 143.

[145] See Malo 53–63, 244–5 (the reign of Waia).

[146] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 65.

[147] Sahlins 1981: 43–4; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 87; note also Seaton 1974: 201, 204.

[148] Ralston 1984: 26–30.

[149] Davenport 1969: 8, suggests that the temple worship of Kū was especially onerous.

[150] While centralising rulers normally intruded into the religious realm through divinisation (*UP* 214–6), the Hawaiian clique attempted to dissolve it entirely. Some argue that the arrival of a non-religious apparatus of power (trade wealth, firearms, etc) facilitated this move. Ellis 126 is the most direct item of primary evidence. See Davenport 1969: 11, 17–18; Webb 1965: 26, 30; Seaton

The principal opportunity for any such popular mobilisation against abolition was Kekuaokalani's impromptu rebellion. As always, such reactions cannot be taken as simply an expression of a religious affront: There were any number of reasons for resenting the oligarchic coup of Ka'ahumanu's people, and it was merely normal for succession to descend into battle. But our sources do underline that Kekuaokalani received substantial support and that his religious cause was central. Dibble for example, avers that 'a large body of the people, when they found that there was still a chief on the side of idolatry, flocked over to his standard', while Bingham even claims that it gained the support of the majority.[151]

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that the abolition was merely imposed on a resentful populace, for after the battle of Kuamo'o there were no further outbreaks of resistance.[152] According to Ralston the abolition was 'widely and readily accepted by most Hawaiian people throughout the archipelago'.[153] Apart from the possible disconnect with popular religion, the most important reason for this was surely the result of the battle itself, the cosmic significance of which was greatly magnified under the conditions of immanentism, as explained above.

The comparative exclusion of commoner men was paralleled in the exclusion of women, who seem to have had their own sphere of religious activity, although it is a measure of its insignificance in the terms of the male-dominated 'official' ideology that we know so little about it. (This is not to say that female priestesses and goddesses lacked significance outside the major temple rites.)[154] Thus we are returned to the gender revolution outlined at the start of the chapter: No wonder that the female chiefs felt able to shrug off the claims of the old system. The manner in which Hawaiian public religion had become so thoroughly entwined with violent conquest, chiefly supremacy and male authority ultimately presented a certain kind of vulnerability.

1974: 202; Harfst 1972: 458; Levin 1968: 405–6, 427; Linnekin 1990: 71; Kashay 2008: 24–5.

[151] Dibble 1839: 67; Dibble 152; Bingham: 74; Kotzebue 1830: 199–200. None of these were in Hawaii at the time, but compare Kamakau 2022: 429.

[152] Bingham 77. [153] Ralston 1985: 323; Ralston 1984: 30; Fischer 1970: 162.

[154] Linnekin 1990: 6, 15, 25–31, 72; Sahlins 1981: 51; Malo 81–2.

The Connivance of the Priests

What of those whom we might imagine would have the most invested in the state cults: its specialist officials? It is true that priests are mentioned as flocking to Kekuaokalani's banner.[155] But in *Unearthly Powers*, it was argued that the high priests of immanentist societies may facilitate rather than obstruct ruler conversions, and Polynesian material was drawn on as the most explicit evidence of this. Hawaii is no exception.[156]

In one sense, the profoundly immanentist quality to Hawaiian religious life led to a certain blurring of the category of priest: Insofar as reproducing appropriate supernatural relations was seen as a vital part of any kind of manipulation of the world, 'any artisan or possessor of specialized knowledge is a *kahuna* or priest'.[157] But the rise of centralised power led to the development of more specifically defined orders of priesthood attached to each of the main gods.[158] These were hereditary orders endowed with land and patronage and organised in a hierarchical manner. Thus, to the extent that these priesthoods failed to provide significant resistance, it is not because of some generic lack of 'sophistication' or institutionalisation. The religious system did lack some of the stabilising effects of literacy, yet it was reproduced, elaborated and rationalised by cadres of full-time specialists who had developed a complex cosmology.[159] Organised in a corresponding manner were the temples and ritual spaces (*heiau*), with four main categories of temple reproduced at different levels of territorial subdivision.[160] The major temples represented forms of monumental architecture covering as much as 12,000 square meters.[161] This was a vast material, ritual and institutional edifice spread across all regions of the archipelago.

Atop this edifice sat the king, the pinnacle of the entire temple hierarchy.[162] In the 'ancient theory' of civil polity described by David Malo, the king formed the head of government and the chiefs its body;

[155] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 379. [156] *UP* 281–5. [157] Valeri 1985: 137.
[158] Immanentist religion may produce priesthoods as organised and hierarchical as any other. See Valeri 1985: ch. 6 and 184 for qualifications, and Davenport 1969: 4–6. Note Sahlins 1995: 256 refers to two main orders of priests, to Lono and to Kū.
[159] Kirch 2010: 56–8. [160] Kirch 2010: 60. [161] Kirch 2010: 58.
[162] Valeri 1985: 187; Dibble 94.

its left-hand was the official in charge of secular affairs, the *kalanimoku* (sometimes 'Prime Minister' in British sources), and his right-hand was the high priest proper or *kahuna nui* (sometimes 'royal chaplain'), who took responsibilities for the king's religious duties.[163] Surely, this is the individual – whose task was to urge 'the king most strenuously to direct his thoughts to the god; to worship without swerving', according to Malo – from whom one would most expect resistance to abolition.[164]

We might be able to conceive of the left-hand conspiring in the secularisation of government – but why did the right-hand join in the applause? Lucy Thurston, among the party of missionaries who arrived shortly after abolition, tells us that:

> After the death of Kamehameha, Liholiho, the young king and Hewahewa, the last idolatrous high priest, cautiously approached a dangerous subject.
>
> PRIEST: 'What do you think of the *kapus*?'
> KING: 'So you think it well to break them?'
> PRIEST: 'That lies with you.'
> KING: 'It is as you say.'
>
> And in this way, endeavouring to penetrate each other's sentiments, they were led to the expression of their own thoughts.

She tells us that Hewahewa was indeed the first to apply the torch to the wooden gods.[165] The system was weakest where it was expected to be strongest – and the missionaries were duly astonished.[166] Shortly after their arrival at Kailua in April 1820, they came face to face with this feared opponent, his skin scaly from the consumption of *awa* (kava, an intoxicant), this 'bloody destroyer of his countrymen' in public sacrifice – and were surprised to find him gratified to meet

[163] Malo 187–8; Kirch 2010: 56. Valeri 1985: 136: 'The balance of power between the king and the chaplain is such that a denial of the king's legitimacy on the part of the chaplain is rare unless the latter has secretly attached himself to a would-be usurper. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the king is the true head of the cult and takes the principal role in rituals.'

[164] Malo 188.

[165] Thurston 1882: 26; Bingham 71. Ellis 127, based on the authority of John Young, who was at the meal and cut up the food, says that Hewahewa had told Liholiho that no ill would follow abolition. Hewahewa was independently an informant of Ellis, and this was before Christianisation (158).

[166] Bingham 74.

them.[167] In 1822, Mathison reported that Hewahewa was by no means prejudiced against the missionaries but was merely waiting for the king's own decision before he moved to convert.[168] By 1823, he was even predicting the future 'enlightenment' of his people.[169]

How to explain this? Was Hewahewa a 'Cleopatra's nose', such that a trivial inclination of his personality happened to facilitate a momentous change? The occupational hazard of *awa* had been exacerbated by an excessive delight in rum.[170] Perhaps his relatively frequent contact with foreigners had bred scepticism.[171] But any explanation must begin with the observation that Hewahewa's behaviour had been prefigured four years previously by his counterpart in Tahiti, Pati'i, high priest to Pomare and a leading figure in the '*ariori* cult that served as the equivalent vehicle of warrior ascendancy there. Pati'i had aligned himself with the promotion of Christianity by casting his paraphernalia into the flames in February 1815.[172] The truth is that nowhere in Polynesia did priesthoods present a lasting obstacle to ruler conversion; a more structural explanation beckons.

Two features of immanentist systems may be invoked. First, where the state cult has been hyper-consolidated around a divinised monarch, the whole system is predicated on their agency: They form the keystone in the arch, and, without their participation, the whole edifice may fall into senselessness. The priesthood lacks the institutional independence to resist, while their claim to represent a separate sphere of moral authority has distinct limits.[173] Second, in religious fields subject to the economy of ritual efficacy, religious specialists may espy an opportunity in establishing their centrality as mediators with new and

[167] Bingham 88. Could Hewahewa even be the former priest referred to by Lucy Thurston (*MH* June 1821, 17, p. 178) who was eager to build a house of worship?

[168] Mathison 1825: 422. Gilbert Farquhar Mathison was in Hawaii between June and August 1822.

[169] Bingham 189, and see 295.

[170] Missionaries found him unprepossessing: Bingham 74, 88, 189.

[171] Thurston 1882: 26 claims that he knew of the futility of his rites ('Neither did they bestow life or health'), but this may be a missionary argument placed in the mouth of the archenemy. See Freycinet 1978: 55; Davenport 1969: 15–16, for his willingness to deal with foreigners.

[172] This was after the first signs that Pomare would transfer his veneration to the Christian God but a month before Pomare dramatically announced his new alignment at a gathering of chiefs. Davies 1961: 184–6.

[173] Note this does not apply to *kaula* or prophets.

powerful deities. Whether or not Hewahewa already considered this strategy at the moment of abolition, he moved with alacrity as soon as the missionaries arrived. Perhaps as a high priest of Kū – associated with the incursion of the foreigner priest Pā'ao – he felt a particular affinity with the arrival of new powers from overseas.[174] If his authorship can be credited, he apparently created one of the earliest Hawaiian–Christian chants in order to welcome the new deity, 'a great god, a powerful god'. It urges people to 'Pray correctly to Jehova / For a powerful priest for the islands' – evidently Hewahewa himself.[175] Like other Polynesian high priests, he imagined he could stay central to the new order.[176]

We know of one who didn't follow where the king led. According to Thurston, one priest refused to eat poi from the women's calabash. 'As a consequence, the king required him to drink a whole quart of whisky. The natives then placed him perpendicularly by the body of a tree, and lashed him with a rope, in such a manner that in a short time it squeezed the very life out of him.'[177] His body was then dragged around town. The king's crude powers of coercive force were not irrelevant, then, but he was also reinstating hierarchical norms that were widely recognised. In 1822, Mathison reports that the priests had 'yielded a ready obedience to the authority of the King, and acquiesced without hesitation in this important change'.[178] The following year Ellis found the 'priests no longer existing as a distinct body, but merged in the other classes of the community'.[179] Their material interests were preserved to some extent as members of the landed gentry.[180]

Transactional and Antagonistic Relations

The priests had to follow the king: Can we say the same of even the gods themselves? In one sense, this is nonsense. The threat of divine

[174] Mykkänen 2003: 60, fn. 34.
[175] Charlot 2010: 34, who argues for the authenticity of the chant on internal grounds.
[176] His interests were apparently looked after (Bingham 74), but his subsequent response to Christianity was variable: Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 68, fn. 21; Ralston 1985: 322–3; Charlot 2010: 34.
[177] Thurston 1882: 28.
[178] Mathison 422. Some counter-evidence alluded to in Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 382, 'the priests, who have lost their occupation, but naturally exercise their subtle influence to recover it'.
[179] Ellis 31. [180] Levin 1968: 425.

retaliation for impiety was very real and was only partly defused by its evident non-materialisation. On another level, however, one notices an arresting consciousness of the fact that gods are in some sense man-made. As Valeri puts it, 'What seems implicit in all Hawaiian religious ideology [is that] man's dependence on the gods in fact conceals the gods' dependence on men. If on the manifest level gods are superior to men, on the latent level men are superior to gods because men control them in ritual.'[181] Men must feed the gods through sacrifice and worship: Only then can they grow fat and powerful.[182] In a sense, the king, as supreme sacrificer, gave life to the gods.[183]

If the theme of antagonism and usurpation is woven throughout many dimensions of Hawaiian political theology, it extends to the general tenor of man's relationship with the gods. At the end of the Makahiki rites, Kū proclaims his ascendancy over Lono, but, in another sense, the king is wresting powers of fertility from the gods to make them productive for humanity.[184] The Makahiki rites took place at a time of year when the Pleiades star cluster rose above the horizon after sunset. Jeffrey Sissons has observed that across Polynesia, this was a period of communitas, collective exuberance, freedom from *kapu*, and violence, before order and hierarchy were re-imposed in May or June.[185] Indeed, this was the principal season for warfare too, in which enemy temples were liable to be torn down. There was therefore a kind of seasonal oscillation between sacralisation and desacralisation, and this may have established a habitus that fuelled popular participation in the Christianising iconoclasms of chiefs in Tahiti and Hawaii and elsewhere – which also tended to occur at this time of year.

That high chiefs were credited with the ritual capacity to re-impose order reflects on their closeness to the divine: They were able to meet deities on their own terms – and return victorious. According to Juri Mykännen, the abolition was a kind of permanent version of precisely this. On arriving at Kailua, Liholiho was sent a message that the *kapu* of his god had been neutralised by a *ti* leaf ritual, leaving the humans

[181] Valeri 1985: 7; Sissons 2014: 20, 144.
[182] O'Connor 2008: 155. *Hoʻomana*, the closest term to 'worship', implies that one is causing *mana* to be imparted to the material representation of the god.
[183] Valeri 1985: 102–4.
[184] Mykkänen 2003: 27–9; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 11. [185] Sissons 2014.

noa or profane.[186] 'By this manipulative manoeuvre – which was unprecedented in its magnitude – the chiefs had established themselves as the sole sovereigns on earth. The gods had been defeated for the last time.'[187] Underlying these interpretations is a sense of the profoundly transactional nature of relations between persons and metapersons to which immanentism may give rise. It is a measure of how close immanentist divinity is to everyday reality that it can be redirected, suspended, appropriated and neutralised by human activity.

Anachronisms of Divinised Kingship

When despotism first reappears, the representation of cosmos, society, and self in one person, a person who combines both terror and benevolence, places that one person under almost unbearable tension.

Robert N. Bellah on Hawaii[188]

Why should it have been those most sanctified by the old system who sought to dismantle it? The premise has already been shown to be deficient, for the prime mover was not the king but Ka'ahumanu and female chiefs who were otherwise denied by it. Nevertheless, their move was drastic: to cut away the ideological underpinnings that also held their *ali'i* status in place. So the problem is not quite yet resolved. Part of the answer has to lie in some apprehension that the old cult had disadvantages whatever the attractions of the status it conferred, that it was somehow anachronistic in the new conjuncture of foreign trade and peaceful dominion. A cult of military prowess and conquest – suitable for a situation of rivalrous chiefly contenders – had to transmogrify into one of established dynastic authority.[189] In the old system, loyalties had been won through the redistributive potential and *mana* revelation of a successful war.[190] On great landmasses, such systems might be fed by indefinite expansion, as per the Mongols sprawling across Asia; in Hawaii, once the archipelago was conquered there was nowhere else to go. The urge to conquer could not be redirected; it must somehow be quietened.

[186] Kamakau 2022: 425, and see what some said on Kamehameha's death: 'The one who maintained the gods has died, so our free eating is appropriate' (415); Dibble 148.
[187] Mykkänen 2003: 36; Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 80. [188] Bellah 2011: 208.
[189] Bellah 2011: 195. [190] Valeri 1985: 348; 1982: 32.

Kamehameha Experiments

Kamehameha understood that his feats of political centralisation and expansion would have to be matched by a reorganisation of the religious realm.[191] He was aware of Christianity as an option – but not an appealing one. William Mariner reports him noting in 1805 that, 'I should be afraid to adopt such a dangerous expedient as Christianity, for I think no Christian King can govern in the absolute manner in which I do, and yet be loved by his subjects as I am by mine' – which may refer to the diminution of chiefly sacrality that would result.[192] He went to work in the indigenous idiom instead, and quite consciously so, according to some: He was using religion 'as an engine of government'.[193] But the tensions inherent in the manufacture of divinised kingship to which Bellah refers were exacerbated by the experience of rapid socio-cultural change and encounter.

The most important innovation involved the Makahiki rites, which were elevated into the principal ritual vehicle for the unification process.[194] Places were found in the procession for gods representing aspects of his authority, such as the poison god, Kālaipāhoa, 'the god who executes the law'; Kūkā'ilimoku, 'the god who takes government by force'; and Kāpala'alaea, 'the god of tribute'.[195] In practical terms, the provision of tribute in the Makahiki became the means by which taxes were funnelled to the centre. In symbolic terms, the elaboration of the Makahiki was also a means of elevating the significance of Lono – the deity most strongly associated with peaceful communal flourishing – at a time when the warrior cult of Kū may have been declining in relevance.[196] If there was a shift towards diminishing the power of the Lono priesthood over Kamehameha's lifetime, it was only because the king sought to assert his own centrality to the popular business of Lono worship more profoundly. Sahlins interprets the

[191] In keeping with the argument in *UP* chs. 2, 3.
[192] Mariner 2012 [1818]: xlvii. Linguistic barriers probably clouded the translation here.
[193] Bingham to Worcester, May 13, 1820, quoted in Mykkänen 2003: 77; Mathison 1825: 442.
[194] Malo 143; 'Ī'ī 72; Corney 1896: 82, 101–2; Sahlins 1995: 208–19; Kirch 2010: 61–3, 67, 208–10.
[195] Sahlins 1995: 218.
[196] Albeit now under the king's personal authority: Sahlins 1995: 256, 263.

following comment in Lord (George Anson) Byron's narrative as a reference to the Lono priests in particular:

> In the early part of his reign, finding that the great and separate power of the priests was dangerous to his authority, especially since he was often absent from his capital, then fixed in Hawaii near Karakakua [Kealakekua], he had taken upon himself the office of priest as well as king.[197]

Another class of gods came to prominence as the warrior gods declined: the sorcery gods, who were seen as no less vital to the attainment and preservation of political authority.[198] In common with the war gods, they allowed the king to destroy his enemies and protect himself from their assaults – only they operated not in moments of battle but against the malignancy of ill-wishers during times of peace.[199] Once the task of conquest was complete, it was rebellion that now became the source of threat, and sorcery gods provided the antidote. But they were an antidote to a multiplying sense of threat. The highest of chiefs could never rest safe; the king could no more monopolise the inherently diffused access to the form of supernatural potency they offered than he could monopolise firearms. Chiefs accumulated sorcery gods and guns both.[200]

At the same time, human sacrifice took place much less frequently as Kamehameha's reign wore on – some sources even claim that it was abolished.[201] The most obvious reason was the fact that Kū, the most bloodthirsty of gods, needed to be stimulated into action far less after Kamehameha's feats of unification.[202] But there was arguably more going on than that. Mortuary slayings seem to have become less acceptable and were disallowed for the funeral of Kamehameha's mother. Kamehameha expressly forbade any human sacrifices for his own funeral (a hog did meet its end) – or indeed at the attempt to avoid his funeral through the healing rites beforehand.[203] Was there some

[197] Byron 1826: 42 (Byron was cousin to the famous poet); Sahlins 1995: 134 (and see also pp. 71, 256), which he relates to Clerke's reference to 'party matters' in 1779. There has to be a doubt here, however, as to whether the source or editor has been confused by the operation of divine kingship and rationalised it thus (compare, for e.g., *PMH* July 1820, 16, 17, p. 334).

[198] ʻĪʻī 123–5; Ellis: 293; Dibble 101; Bingham 72.

[199] Valeri 1982: 25; Valeri 1985: 183.

[200] Valeri 1982: 30.

[201] Corney 1896: 101; Kotzebue 1821: 247; Sahlins 1981: 64.

[202] Valeri 1982: 29.

[203] Kotzebue 1821: 247–8; Kotzebue 1830: 195; Dibble 1839: 61; Bingham 70.

more general sense in which human sacrifices were seen as out of tune with the tenor of domesticated government?

Kamehameha was also involved in manipulations of the symbolism of the violent/productive aspects of sovereignty through his ritual relationship with his son Liholiho, whom he placed in a position of superior divinity to himself, as Valerio Valeri has explained.[204] The traditional vision of kingship as a never-resolved and endlessly replayed movement from the disorderly to the orderly, from the wild to the tamed, had been thrown into confusion by the sudden lasting peace.[205] For all that Kamehameha pushed Liholiho into different symbolic positions on the game board (for he was already something of a pawn in manoeuvres of political theology well before the abolition), the implication of Valeri's analysis is that he did not ultimately arrive at a solution.[206]

Indeed, the sudden absence of war upset the existing order in Hawaii in more ways than one.[207] Elsewhere in Polynesia the abandonment of the old system (through conversion) was partly a means to escape war; in Hawaii it was a means of coping with the fact that war had ended! This is only superficially paradoxical. Both reflect the way in which the pre-existing ritual system had become driven by the needs of war-makers.

The Burdens of Disorderly Succession and Ritual Order

All monarchical polities are likely to crack into conflict when the question of succession arises; where divinised kingship prevails, this may be accompanied by a keenly felt loss of cosmological order. Any longer-term stabilisation of authority must involve finding a way to contain the fissiparous energies expressed at such moments.

In Hawaii, however, contested succession was mandated by both the heritable and empirical forms of *mana*.[208] As noted above, a form of diarchy arose in order to acknowledge the genealogical claims of

[204] Dibble 80–1; Valeri 1985: 192.
[205] Valeri 1982: 29. Paradoxically, the withering of war also undermined the orderly dimension of divinised kingship, given that as 'the god and his closest reflection among humans, the king, *represented not order but order as the transcendence of disorder*' (19).
[206] Valeri, 1982: 29.
[207] Best expressed in Harfst 1972: 466–7; cf. Seaton 1974: 201.
[208] See above.

collateral relatives (brothers, nephews) while reducing their access to the levers of power.[209] This is what happened when Kekuaokalani was given care of the feathered god of Kūkā'ilimoku, while Liholiho succeeded to the kingship proper.[210] But this 'sacral' role of god-guardianship was not ritualised out of the political game; its divinised status could be translated into social power. The logic of this junior role was written in the legends around the king of 'Umi, 'the paradigmatic *ali'i*'.[211] He was the first to come to power as a usurping holder of the feathered god, Kūkā'ilimoku, and is also the figure whom Patrick Kirch associates with the historical transition from chiefship to kingship proper, as the *ali'i nui* shifted from being a primarily ceremonial role to one based on the control and threat of violence.[212] Care of the feathered god was then implicitly related to the very origin of statehood.[213]

Kamehameha himself had been a usurper, who had initially been the custodian of Kūkā'ilimoku (as the son of the younger brother of Kalaniopu'u) and then overcame Kiwala, who had taken the superior role.[214] On assuming the throne, then, the most immediate existential threat to Liholiho was precisely the re-enactment of that principle, and history certainly did not fail to follow myth on this occasion. While the act of abolition was, in one sense, a spur to that attempted usurpation, it was also an attempt to destroy the underlying cultural mechanism that might anyway have produced it.[215] Succession could now be conceived as simply a matter of the rules of primogeniture: Nothing else mattered.[216] Charisma was not so much routinised as stopped dead in its tracks.[217]

One function of diarchy is to spread the ceremonial burden of cosmic kingship, so that the isolation and vulnerability of the ritualisation trap are avoided.[218] Indeed, European and American observers sometimes imagined that the sheer weight of ritual activity borne by paramount chiefs must have been something that they were eager to

[209] Davenport 1969: 11, on diarchy and factionalism. The problem of brothers and nephews afflicts monarchical systems in general: Duindam 2011: 16.
[210] 'Ī'ī 140; Ellis 126. [211] Valeri 1985: 277. [212] Kirch 2010: 92–103.
[213] Valeri 1985: 163; Sahlins 1981: 24. [214] Davenport 1969: 12, 16.
[215] Linnekin 2008: 213 ('Given the cultural scenario of usurpation, what better way to undercut the ritual potency of a junior collateral than to declare that the gods no longer have *mana*?'); Mykkänen 2003: 36.
[216] Levin 1968: 402–30. [217] Weber 1978, I: 242–8. [218] Valeri 1985: 149.

shrug off, particularly once they saw foreigners going about their business with few such concerns.[219] Some scholars have followed suit, pointing to the laborious rites of the Makahiki season, the obtuse considerations dictating when to travel and trade, the procedures necessary to wage war or the impracticalities of certain *kapu* pertaining to the very highest ranking chiefs who could not be seen in the daytime.[220] Some delicacy of interpretation is called for here. On the one hand, Europeans were surely inclined to exaggerate the disadvantages of the ritualised office, given that in their eyes it was pointless bunk to begin with.[221] It may only be in retrospect – when their superfluity is categorically apparent – that the old customs are felt as cumbersome, as when John Papa ʻĪʻī, in referring to the *kapu* that Liholiho inherited from his parents, comments 'should their observance be continued today you would see how troublesome and unrealistic they were'.[222] Kamehameha stands as an example of the capacity of the old system to produce extremely effective political actors, flexibly pursuing ambitious schemes of conquest and trade.

Still, Kamehameha was of relatively lesser rank, as he was only too aware. It is telling that, even as he exploited this status, he also sought to remedy it through his efforts to place his son in a more exalted sacred role. Furthermore, Sahlins has suggested that his 'retirement' to Hawaiʻi Island in 1812, leaving the bulk of day-to-day commerce and government to Kaʻahumanu's people in Oʻahu, was a means of protecting his office from the defiling implications of these activities.[223] It was this very retirement, of course, that then handed the initiative to Kaʻhaumanu's people and allowed them to usurp some of his executive function. If Sahlins is right it would mean that Kamehameha was trying to deal with a certain contradiction between the *kapu* regime and the new demands of governance in two ways, firstly by insulating his own office and his son's from those demands, and secondly by diminishing to some extent the *kapu* regime itself: We know that he reduced the period for which he was under *kapu* isolation from forty to ten days.[224] This might help us to make sense of the report that during his last sickness he addressed his chiefs thus: 'If I shall recover from this sickness, the charge of tabu shall devolve upon Liholiho, my son and

[219] Kotzebue 1821: 247; Davenport 1969: 7.
[220] Including Kamehameha's predecessor. See Webb 1965: 30–1.
[221] Ellis 15–2. [222] ʻĪʻī 52. [223] Sahlins 1981: 58–60.
[224] Fischer 1970: 164.

successor, and he shall uphold the system, but the rest of us will live unrestrained'.[225] Liholiho would be placed within the ultimate ritualisation trap, becoming the sole repository of cosmological responsibility at the expense of governmental immobility.

Liholiho would not have made a terribly convincing heavenly sovereign. Something went wrong during his attempt to consecrate a temple to Kū while he was in seclusion at Kawaihae and preparing for the final act of his accession. Given that Liholiho had been carefully brought up in the ritual procedures of his office, there must have been a psychological dynamic behind his inebriated inadequacy here, though we are left to speculate whether it involved grief at his father's death, resentment at his father's post-mortem influence or some other form of performance anxiety.[226] It seems that this induced a fear that he would not receive the desired support from the gods and risked challenge therefore from other chiefs – an important reason for his siding with the abolitionists.[227] To pass over this as a trivial cause would be to underestimate how serious the implications of ritual failure were.[228] Hawaiian sources are clear on the grave dangers attendant on the 'irreligious' king – understood as a matter of ritual infelicity (in true immanentist fashion) rather than ethical purity. And Liholiho's bungling would only have underlined a more general point: Even in the conduct of ritual the existing system placed one's authority in empirical jeopardy.[229]

[225] Dibble 145–6. It is difficult to know how much credence to give this report. It could have been disseminated during the abolition to bestow Kamehameha's blessing on the new regime, except that it is wrong about Liholiho's role, and it takes to a logical conclusion his strategy of finding sacralised substitutes to free himself for the business of governing. Note also the report (Dibble 82–3; first reported in *MH* June 1821, 17, 6, p. 173; and see Bingham 70) that on his deathbed he asked an American trader to tell him about the Americans' god (possibly a post-hoc invention).

[226] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 443 also refers to scepticism promoted by his foreign acquaintances.

[227] Dibble 149, and see Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 76; Bingham 73; Kashay 2008: 26.

[228] Valeri 1985: 153; Levin 1968: 423; Davenport 1969: 7.

[229] See 'Ī'ī 39 on how ritual conduct could be assessed.

8 *Hawaii: The High Path to Conversion, 1821–1830*

The path by which such transgressors were to find the heavenly rest was represented as narrow and straight, leading through great self-denial and many difficulties, requiring vigilance and perseverance, the renunciation or abandonment of much of what is valued by the world but is unfavourable to the interest of the soul.

Hiram Bingham[1]

Reading the major accounts by the American missionaries, the years from their arrival in April 1820 to the baptism of the ruling chiefs in December 1825 seem like a long and arduous trek, in which success was contingent on their own pious exertions and the favourable wind of providence at their backs. As if cheated by the removal of paganism before their arrival, Bingham's narrative in particular seeks to emphasise the obduracy of the new obstacle they had to surmount: It is irreligion, formed out of the hard matter of human pleasure-seeking.[2] British missionaries visiting in the summer of 1822 were contrarily inclined to wonder at the peculiarly agreeable situation their American brethren had arrived into. Surely, they had started more than half-way up the mountain?[3]

The American narrative is worth listening to: It makes clear that the abolition of the old system was not undertaken as a conscious prelude to the acceptance of Christianity. The latter needed to be argued for, the political weather needed to be propitious and the will of Ka'ahumanu, 'the most proud, unbending Lady in the whole island', needed somehow to be bent.[4] Some of the hurdles to missionary schemes everywhere were indeed still standing. One was the understandable apprehension that the missionaries represented an

[1] Bingham 267. [2] Bingham 102–3.
[3] Tyerman to Bruder 10 August 1822, Oahoo, CWM/LMS, South Seas.
[4] Dampier 1971: 45.

unattractive and undigested form of foreign potency.[5] Such was the connection between ritual specialists and political force that it could be difficult to credit that they were not the harbingers of some new political order (much in the same way that the current chiefly class was associated with the arrival of Pā'ao).[6] Local elites were hardly mistaken in perceiving the threat from Euro-American imperialism, and they knew well enough how it was in other parts of the world.[7] Was Bingham smuggling in men in barrels and storing them in the cellar of the first frame house he built in 1821?[8] Sometimes missionaries were suspected of being sorcerers, able to pray people to death and given to bloodthirsty rites.[9]

Furthermore, if foreignness could be attractive in some instances, the Americans were the wrong sort of foreigner. Since the days of Cook and Vancouver, the Hawaiian chiefs seem to have taken their association with and nominal subservience to the monarchy of Great Britain surprisingly seriously. In his first proper meeting with the king and his councillors, Bingham reports that 'another grave objection was that the Government of Great Britain might not be pleased with the settlement of American missionaries . . . this seems to be a serious matter'.[10] It was following the arrival of Lord Byron's embassy from Britain that the public declaration of chiefly baptism was finally made.[11]

Nevertheless, we may note that the same group, Ka'ahumanu's people, who were behind the abolition were also behind the conversion. Indeed, some had already shown an inclination to Christianity before the arrival of the missionaries. Five years is not a long time to accomplish such a radical undertaking, and closer inspection reveals that many of the more important boundary stones in conversion were crossed long before 1825. It was the extraordinarily strict standards of a Calvinist baptism that strung the whole process out. While it would be quite wrong to say that Christianity had been the object of the ruling oligarchy all along, some of the same political considerations and instincts that had pushed them towards disregarding the old religion now pushed them towards the new.

[5] Sahlins 1981: 28–9; Mykkänen 2003: 40–1.
[6] Mykkänen 2003: 37; Dibble 1839: 86–7.
[7] Ellis 319; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 398, 471; Freycinet 1978: 24; Ellis to Bruder, 26 May, CWM/LMS, South Seas.
[8] Mykkänen 2003: 37–8; Dibble 1839: 73, 78.
[9] Dibble 176; Bingham: 131, 208. Compare Mutapa in *UP* 235–6.
[10] Bingham 88; also Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 381.
[11] Bingham 205, 264–9.

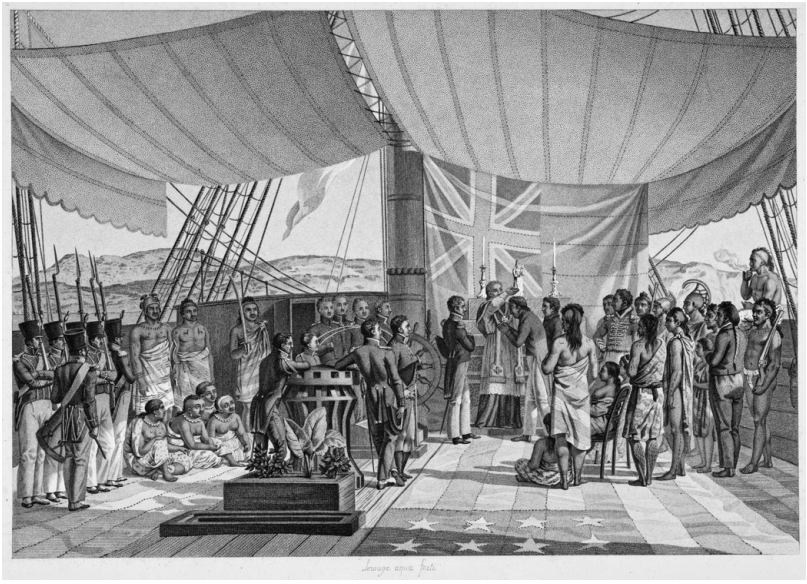


Figure 8.1 Illustration of the baptism of Kalanimoku, the 'Prime Minister of the Sandwich Islands', on August 12, 1819, aboard the French ship *L'Uranie*, which was on a scientific voyage under Louis de Freycinet (1779–1842). The original sketch by Jacques Arago was probably enhanced as an engraving for the book, Freycinet 1823.

Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art. Gift of Frances Damon Holt in memory of John Dominis Holt, 1996 (25,834).

Almost as if providentially designed to test a scholarly hypothesis about contrasting confessional standards of baptism, the appearance of two French warships under the command of Captain Louis Freycinet in August 1819 presented the opportunity to be baptised by a Catholic ship's chaplain – and Kalanimoku (Billy Pitt) and Boki took it, as is depicted in Figure 8.1.[12] This was just after the *kapu* had been suspended and no-one knew what might happen next. Freycinet claims that Kalanimoku told the chaplain 'that for a long time he had wished to become a Christian', though it is doubtful how much significance he attributed to the rite.[13]

[12] Done without Ka'ahumanu's knowing. 'Ī'ī 142–3; Davenport 1969: 15; Sahlins 1981: 63.

[13] Freycinet 1978: 24–5, 35. Byron 1826: 49, therefore refers to 'the spontaneous will of the natives' in implanting Christianity.

From quite early on, several of Ka'ahumanu's people led the way in adopting Christianity. Kuakini's house became an early centre of Christian learning, and Kalanimoku was one of the first high chiefs to attend the school set up by Mr. Loomis.[14] Ka'ahumanu herself was cool towards the missionaries, who were rather struck by her haughty way with them: She certainly needed convincing.[15] But her marriage to Kaumuali'i, the last King of Kaua'i, for political reasons in September 1821 placed an early proponent of Christianity in a position of counsel to the grand chief.[16] As with many other Pacific chiefly conversions, a notable turning point was her illness in December of that year. She received two Russian doctors to treat her and also Sybil Bingham to assist in her nursing. The queen told Sybil's husband Hiram, 'I think more about God in my sickness', and he replied that God could offer both kinds of salvation: the immanent (he could restore her to health) and transcendent (he could take her ransomed soul to heaven).[17] After a solemn prayer appealing to 'the health-giving mercies of God', she was soon restored and 'there was from this period a marked difference in her demeanour towards the missionaries, which became more and more striking'.[18]

The visit of William Ellis and his Tahitian assistants in the spring of 1822 also made a significant impression on the queen's attitude and that of society more generally.[19] This group were the first who could actually speak an approximation of the local language properly.[20] In June, Ka'ahumanu was making tours of the major islands, in which she renewed the focus on destroying cult objects of the old regime.[21]

[14] Bingham: 99, 127, 132, 144; Ellis, O'ahu, 18 June 1823; Ellis to Bruder, 26 May 1823, CWM/LMS, South Seas; Mykkänen 2003: 40–4.

[15] Dibble 1839: 89; Bingham 106.

[16] Bingham 113, 133, 149.

[17] Bingham 149.

[18] Bingham 151–64 reports that afterwards she still resisted conversion and was irritated by the earnest Christianity of her recent husband Kaumuali'i during his illness, but also that her stiffness towards the missionaries had unbent from the time of her illness. See also Kashay 2008: 36.

[19] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 392, 417; Mykkänen 2003: 51.

[20] The blossoming of the mission thereafter indicates how seriously linguistic infelicity could hamper progress: Tyerman to Bruder 10 August 1822, Oahoo, CWM/LMS, South Seas; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 392–98. Note the defensiveness of Bingham 103. Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 74.

[21] Not yet in the name of Christianity: Bingham 162; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 484–5.

The following month, Ellis reported that, 'A spirit of inquiry was excited among the chiefs and people, and several seemed earnestly desirous to know and serve the living God … Among them, Ke'eaumoku was conspicuous; he not only attended public worship, but collected the people together by ringing a large bell every evening.'[22]

In hindsight, then, the period from mid-1823 to mid-1825 is testimony to the extent to which the missionaries, ardent suitors for so long, now wished to play hard to get. They insisted that their neophytes learn to read and write before they could be considered suitable.[23] They wanted the mind alive and the heart on display; they would not be wooed by cold imitation. They revelled in the high and hard path they had laid out.[24]

As for Liholiho himself, he often appears in our sources, both primary and secondary, as an errant prince, simply too inept, sybaritic or drunk to advance a clear strategy in either the political or religious spheres.[25] It certainly seems as if in both arenas he was outmanoeuvred. The chiefs had dispossessed him of access to material resources while Ka'ahumanu's people operated the levers of government. He was almost rendered the ceremonial king of his father's imagination – except that he had been stripped of divine potency too and therefore suffered most from the desacralisation of the chiefly class.[26] Perhaps some consciousness of this lay behind his fitful engagement with Christianity. It is important to note that Liholiho seems to have shared in the general softening of the high chiefs towards Christianity over these years.[27] In May 1822, he claimed to the English missionaries Tyerman and Bennet that 'he readily professed a wish that his family and subjects should become Christians, but intimated that the principal chiefs were averse to it at present; and that it

[22] Ellis 45; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 473. [23] Bingham 148, 213, 251–3.
[24] Mykkänen 2003: 73. Calvinist baptism, unlike Catholic, would not wash away sin: Bingham 214.
[25] The Journal of Marin (Gast and Conrad, eds. 2002) is obsessed with the king's alcoholism and poor health.
[26] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 61.
[27] He early welcomed missionaries (*MH* June 1821 17, p. 178) and in 1821 talked of building a palace with an upper story devoted to the worship of Jehovah (Bingham 132).

would require time, as well as further knowledge of the subject, to reconcile them to so great a change'.[28] If this could be a standard stalling tactic, he actually applied himself to the task of learning to read and write in this year and insisted that no-one should take precedence in this regard.[29] In January 1823, a classificatory sister of Liholiho died, and the king requested a Christian burial for her.[30] During the commemorative rituals for the three-year accession to the sovereignty in April–May 1823, he allowed missionaries to preach their urgent message.[31]

So, although he would not subject himself to the strictures of the Calvinist missionaries – he told Bingham that he would like just five years more of sin before he repented – in many other contexts Liholiho would surely count as a royal conversion.[32] He did not make much further movement in that direction, however, and this may have been a response to the way that Ka'ahumanu and other chiefs had now more firmly associated themselves with Christianity: They had usurped this arena too.[33] In September 1823, Liholiho's birth mother, Keōpūolani, who had also been crucial to the instigation of the abolition in 1819, became the first high chief to be baptised, though she had to wait for her deathbed.[34] As the surrounding chiefs began to monopolise even this source of potential power, it seems that it was only left for Liholiho to throw a wild card: his departure for England in November 'to seek a lord' in King George IV.[35] He would, perhaps, return with a variety of foreign-derived status that no-other chief could match.

[28] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 439. He may have had possession of the sorcery idol of Kalaipāhoa (Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 450–1), which could help explain Ka'ahumanu's subsequent purge of these gods (see below).

[29] Mykkänen 2003: 46. In August he wrote to a king of Huahine, 'I now serve the God of you and us. We are now learning the *palapala*.' Bingham 172.

[30] Bingham 175.

[31] Bingham 183; also Ellis to Bruder, 26 May, 1823, CWM/LMS, South Seas, which comments that popular opinion was 'much more decided in favour of Christianity than when I last wrote'.

[32] Bingham 178, 259.

[33] As Mykkänen 2003: 44–50 argues.

[34] Ellis, October 26, 1824, Huahine South Seas, CWM/LMS, South Seas. On the baptism of Keōpūolani: 'Account of Keopuolani. . .' CWM/LMS, South Seas. Chiefs opposed to her conversion tried to obstruct a visit from the Tahitian Tau'ā (Bingham 194).

[35] Bingham 204; Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 85.

In the meantime, Ka'ahumanu and Kalanimoku were in charge, and the way was now open for the queen to publicly announce the Sabbath, promote the cause of the schools and set about erecting a Christian order. This was decided upon in a special meeting in a school-house in Honolulu in April 1824.[36] The problem of what to do with the king himself – still somehow cognitively central though ideologically and practically diminished – had been temporarily removed.[37]

Empirical Victories

This chiefly movement towards the Calvinist dispensation both furthered the original impulse behind the abolition and supplied a remedy to its less satisfactory consequences. To consider firstly the former, it may seem ironic to suggest that in an important sense Christianity served to complete the disenchantment of the geographical and political landscape. It was noticed that the 1819 abolition had dismantled the religious structures of chiefly power, while leaving much popular religion intact. Ka'ahumanu's idol-busting tour of the windward islands in 1822 now extended this project more widely. Bingham tells us that in June 'she sent for Kamehameha's image of Kalaipāhoa, the so-called poison deity, and caused it to be publicly burnt along with nine other images. On the 26th of the same month, one hundred and two idols collected from different parts of Hawaii where they had been hidden ... were, by her authority, committed to the flames.'[38]

Ka'ahumanu was not explicitly identifying herself as a Christian at this stage, though her sympathies had already taken a strong turn in this direction. She was no more ready than Liholiho to bow to the strict demands of the Calvinists. So the grand tour served clearly political ends in the first instance.[39] Indeed, she was actually performing an upside down Makahiki circuit, not during the winter months of Lono's passage but in the summer, when Kū had normally reigned.[40] The

[36] Bingham 212. [37] Liholiho's cognitive centrality: Mykkänen 2003: 45.
[38] Bingham 162; greater detail in Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 484–6. Also Ellis 44.
[39] Kashay 2008: 29 argues that, 'The commoners' propitiation of the gods clearly mocked the chiefs' pronouncements of free eating ... Now they, and not the chiefs were directly associated with the gods ... Ka'ahumanu's tour around the islands in 1822 can be seen as an effort to clarify the chief's authority.'
[40] Kashay 2008: 30.

common people supplied her with offerings, with tribute, as she claimed the land for her regime.

It may be significant that the only god named by Bingham above was a sorcery god personal to Kamehameha, and eight of the other gods named seem to be related this god of poison.[41] Thus, if Kamehameha had sought to deal with the political–personal threat of usurping sorcery through what could in the end amount to no more than an arms race, Ka'ahumanu may have perceived that general disarmament provided a more complete answer.[42] Yet, it is not a coincidence that this took place after the progress of Christianity had received a boost with the arrival of the Tahitians and William Ellis: She had set off with the Tahitian convert teacher Auna as part of her entourage. Auna wrote in his journal:

> I thought of what I had witnessed at Tahiti and Moorea, when the idols were burnt, particularly the idols burnt by Patii, and with my heart praised Jehovah, the true God, that I had witnessed these people following our example. Taumorii [Kaumuali'i] and Kaahumanu talked with me a good deal this day about our burning the idols at Tahiti and said that they had burned theirs.[43]

The auto-iconoclastic possibilities of immanentism had been boosted by the more radical vision supplied by monotheism.[44]

By the summer of 1823, during William Ellis's second and more extended visit to the islands, the chiefly war against alternative sources of supernatural potency was undertaken in a much more explicitly Christian vein. This time it was directed against the only really formidable form of cultic resistance remaining. The worship of Pele seems to have retained a kind of public authority and degree of organised presence after 1819 and provides us with the most significant acts of opposition to the new secular order.[45] No doubt it had retained its position due to its ambiguous relationship with the state cults of the

[41] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 89, fn. 16. [42] See 'Ī'ī 12.

[43] Auna's journal, 24 June 1822, quoted in Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 89, fn. 16.

[44] Mathison (1825: 429–31), visiting June to August 1822, commented that it was now even difficult to buy an 'idol' and they now 'despise the very idols which they till lately had adored'.

[45] Linnekin 1990: 31; Ralston 1985: 326; Ellis 249, though note a Pele temple in ruins (266); Bingham 208.

four major male gods. It is striking, given the gender dimension to the political convulsions, that Pele was the most significant female deity and that the charge against her was led by the same female chiefs who had been involved in the abolition.[46] Pele's unusual power to resist the chiefly mandate may derive in part from the awesome and continuous demonstration of observable efficacy provided by her volcanic activity.[47] It would not be easy to confront a deity whose displeasure was so devastatingly undeniable – but she was finally defeated, again, through an interplay between the disconfirmatory tactics of missionaries and those of locals treading the path to conversion.

In his 1823 tour, William Ellis had journeyed up to the volcanoes of Kīlauea, and there acted with deliberate disdain for the goddess, eating tabued berries and throwing stones into the crater, much to the dismay of the Hawaiians.[48] A few months later, in 1824, a priestess of Pele arrived at Lahaina in Maui, causing 'excitement among all classes' and 'followed by thousands of people', and requested an audience with the high chiefs who were staying there.[49] She asserted that Pele had expressed her anger against the defilements of the foreigners at Kīlauea, and that if they were not banished then the land would be inundated with lava.[50] Confronted as to her credentials by a female chief named Kalakua at this point, she replied that she had 'come from foreign lands, England and America, whither I went to attend your king'. Kalakua insisted that all volcanoes were rather controlled by the Great God of Heaven, and the prophetess was sent packing.[51]

The missionaries had decided not to attend this encounter, though a Tahitian was present to give the crowd a pious harangue, and nor was their agency essential when the chiefess Kapiʻolani undertook the hundred miles journey to Kīlauea at the end of the year 'to break the spell which held many of the people in superstitious awe'.[52] She met another priestess of Pele en route, who predicted her death should she continue. The priestess claimed to be no less than a manifestation of or vehicle for Pele and that she held a text from the goddess inscribed on

[46] Linnekin 1990: 72.
[47] Ellis 313. Compare the effects of earthquakes on neophyte Samoans: Williams 1837: 443.
[48] Ellis 220, 234–66. [49] Bingham 226; Ellis 275. [50] Ellis 276.
[51] Bingham 227; Ralston 1985: 326. [52] Bingham 254.

bark cloth. Kapi'olani proved to her own satisfaction that it was no such thing.[53] (These two encounters with Pele priestesses illustrate how monarchy persisted as a touchstone of legitimacy, but also how rapidly popular religious culture had assimilated the authority of foreign *mana* and the text).

What Kapi'olani did once she reached the volcanic crater became a notable event in Hawaiian history and the subject of an earnest poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.[54] There she met the missionary Goodrich and, with her company of some eighty people, descended to a ledge above the crater and addressed its majestic emptiness thus:

> Jehovah is my God. He kindled these fires. I fear not Pele. If I perish by the anger of Pele, then you may fear the power of Pele, but if I trust in Jehovah, and he shall save me from the wrath of Pele when I break through her tabus, then you must fear and serve the Lord Jehovah. All the gods of Hawaii are vain.

Pele is not scorned as a fable in these words but is a power tried and found wanting. Confronted by the existential threat of the *palapala*, the priestesses of Pele were forced to threaten the materialisation of dreadful consequences – and weakened when this was not forthcoming.[55] Thus was Pele doused.

The Hawaiian chiefs had cast their eyes over the landscape and found that there were still pools of immanent power here and there, which might become the breeding grounds for political opposition. Having set about draining them, they now discovered that it was more efficient to saturate the land with the force of a higher power, as unitary as sovereignty aspired to be.

So we arrive at a consideration of what the ruling chiefs felt they lacked now that religion had been excised from the operation of power. The answer is not self-evident: On the surface, life went on. Beneath the surface, there was movement. The first need felt by the chiefs was simply access to immanent power on their own part, to be

[53] Bingham 255.

[54] Dampier 1971: 62; Bingham 256 considered this event 'so important in its bearing upon the remaining idolatry in the islands'; Ellis 277, writing shortly afterwards, was more circumspect.

[55] Ellis 309–13, for another encounter between Ellis and a Pele priestess and general disconfirmation of Pele.

directed towards preserving their own bodies from disease and attacking others in war. We have seen that Ka'ahumanu's own slow bending included a moment of need on her sickbed. Other chiefs displayed a typical vacillation between the new and old ritual routes to health, depending partly on their varying fortunes.[56] Ke'eaumoku Cox, for example, showed definite signs of acknowledging the superiority of the Christian god, but when he fell into the sickness that killed him in 1824 he had recourse to heathen sacrifices to ward off the sorcery directed at him.[57] Kuakini (John Adams), however, had apparently acquired a certain mistrust of the *kahuna*s after their failure to deal with a disability of his limbs as a youth.[58] And when he fell ill as governor of Hawaii, he sent hog after hog to be sacrificed to no avail, which rather inclined him to 'save his bacon in future', as our missionary authors quip.[59]

That the major rebellion of these years, which emerged in Kaua'i in August 1824, took on a religious colouring indicates that it was clear to all that a new Christian order had arrived, well before the missionaries themselves finally deigned to consecrate it. It is rather fascinating that the disaggregation of the transformation of the Hawaiian monarchy into the death of the old and the resurrection of the new also produced two Constantine moments. In the first encounter, in 1819, the old gods had failed; in the second Jehovah's martial power would be confirmed.

As always, there were perfectly secular motives at issue in the first instance. It arose from the unfinished work of centralisation: the king of Kaua'i, Kaumuali'i had been compelled to marry Ka'ahumanu to keep his ambitions tamed. When he died on 26 May 1824, he left instructions that he would not be succeeded by his son Humehume but by his nephew Luanu'u Kahalai'a. Kalanimoku installed the latter as a chief subordinate to Honolulu and refused to meet expectations that the deceased's lands be redistributed. Kaua'i's loss of independence was thus made explicit.[60] The disgruntled son, also known as George

[56] 'Ī'ī 48 on Kalanimoku's sickness. Ellis 293, 316–25 for illness focussing the minds of lesser chiefs in weighing up traditional versus Christian efficacy.
[57] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 85. Sacrificial rituals had been conducted at his wife's death to ascertain who the attacking sorcerers were.
[58] Bingham 79. [59] Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 423.
[60] Mykkänen 2003: 49; Bingham 228–39.

Kaumualiʻi, led a rebellion. He targeted the church on Kauaʻi built by his rival close to the fort at Waimea and then attacked the fort itself.

While the rebels showed some signs of resenting the new learning, now so associated with the supremacy of Hawaiʻi Island, it was clear that the ruling chiefs felt sorely in need of divine assistance.[61] When Kalanimoku was dispatched to Kauaʻi, he first asked the missionaries to lead him in prayer before entering the fort and then prayed again before the commencement of battle.[62] Meanwhile in Lahaina, Kaʻahumanu ordered a fast and a suspension of work and play, while the chiefs and people partook in public worship.[63] Supplication of deity, application of *kapu*: These old forms appeared now in only somewhat altered guise. But they were effective; Jehovah responded. Not only was Kalanimoku's small garrison victorious, but in the decisive battle a body of native teachers and scholars had fought in some of the most dangerous positions, had audaciously captured the field gun managed by the rebel himself and yet had reportedly escaped without injury.[64] Ellis later quoted from a letter by one of the young chiefs leading the charge who exclaimed, 'God is peace, surely his power must have been ahead and over us, and his hand must have warded off the bullets as we could not have escaped.'[65]

There was public thanksgiving when the chiefs arrived back in Honolulu.[66] Once again, the role of Auna was surely important here in shaping the psychology: He had told the chiefs that Jehovah had already revealed himself a god of battles in Tahiti, and now they knew it for themselves.[67] The seal was set on the chief's affiliation with the new faith.[68] Kalanimoku felt a personal appreciation of his own

[61] On associations with anti-Christian rumblings, see Ellis, 26 October 1824, Huahine, CWM/LMS, South Seas.
[62] Bingham 235.
[63] Bingham's narrative reveals that astrology was also being deployed to predict victory (238) and that he had been asked to take on an equivalent function (229).
[64] Ellis, 26 October 1824, Huahine, CWM/LMS, South Seas; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 69; Mykkänen 2003: 51.
[65] Ellis 26, October 1824, Huahine, CWM/LMS, South Seas, which also refers to a letter by Kalanimoku.
[66] Bingham 242. [67] Bingham 162. [68] Dibble 1839: 93–5.

safeguarding.[69] Ka'ahumanu's unbending was complete: She wept at the thanksgiving and later greeted the missionaries with unprecedented warmth, exclaiming that 'we have been preserved by Jesus Christ'.[70]

Not until Liholiho returned from Britain as a corpse under the care of Lord Byron in May 1825, did the official process of conversion begin. After the funeral, Ka'ahumanu and others offered themselves for baptism.[71] It was, perhaps, not so much the death of Liholiho that signalled the final end of the old order but the management of its reception: Orders were published against the usual chaos, against even drunkenness and crying. There would be no sense of cosmological disarray during the mourning; there would be no sense of cosmology.[72] It was only a man who had died.

The State Remade

Chiefly Status

Was that really all Liholiho had been? It is intriguing that the 1819 abolition did not immediately affect the status of the high chiefs in the short term. If the whole system was constructed around the fact of chiefly divinity, why did their reduction to the profane not cause greater ructions?[73] One answer is that the government simply needed such grandiose schemes of legitimacy much less now that it had secular means of coercion at its disposal.[74] No doubt Kekuaokalani's defeat at the hands of the superior firepower of the chiefs in 1819 had focussed minds.[75] However, the fact is that commoners showed few signs of needing to be put in their place; their habitual deference for chiefs seems to have largely remained intact.[76]

The disenchantment of kingship was something foisted upon Liholiho, and it is worth noting that he did not always peaceably submit. In January and February 1821 he had ordered that the

[69] Mykkänen 2003: 58 cites *Ka manao o na alii* and also refers (51–2) to a number of contemporary archival sources referring to the interpretation of Jehovah's assistance in battle, which all supports Bingham 240–7. Bingham had been in Kaua'i at the start of the conflict, but the missionaries were soon ordered to leave (235).

[70] Bingham 248. [71] Bingham 267. [72] Mykkänen 2003: 54.

[73] Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 68. [74] Davenport 1969: 17–18; Webb 1965: 26.

[75] Sahlins 1981: 62–4. [76] Ralston 1984; Daws 1968: 59; Mykkänen 2003: 78.

traditional hula dance be practised and performed.[77] This was a finale to the New Year celebrations, which had focussed on Lono's regenerative power, though Liholiho claimed to the suspicious missionaries that it was just 'play and not idol worship'.[78] Here, the king's divine centrality was burnished through an evocation of his sexual beauty.[79] It is about this time that a drunk Liholiho had rounded on a complaining Bingham with the reply, 'I am god myself. What the hell! Get out of my house.'[80] State spectacle of some sort continued. A few months later, Liholiho's accession to the sovereignty was commemorated through an extravagant festival lasting from 24 April to 8 May, in which 'heathenism and Christianity displayed each a banner'.[81] It is difficult to estimate the extent to which this pageant – some of which seems to have been innovated, and much of which seems to have been concerned with elevating the female chiefs – was new or alluded to royal divinity. But royal *status* certainly was its aim, produced through a display of finery, both worn and consumed by fire. If this was a replacement for the Makahiki rites, kings now took the place of gods, undisguised.[82] But, in general, the information as to how Liholiho stood in the eyes of his people is sparse and conflicting.[83]

Whatever Liholiho's particular status, chiefs continued to be held in high esteem.[84] The most striking demonstration of this lies in the operation of top-down conversion itself, considered below, as commoners deferred all agency to the chiefs.[85] Part of the answer lies simply with the persistence of habits of deference long-ingrained in the body-memory (or 'habitus') and habits of thought lodged deep in the semi-conscious mind ('mentality'), which would not be

[77] Bingham 123–9.

[78] Bingham 129. He quite appreciated that the hulas 'had been interwoven too with their superstitions, and made subservient to the honour of their gods, and their rulers'. Sahlins 1985: 5 on the hula.

[79] Kashay 2008: 27–8; Sahlins 1985:15–17 refers to the 'political economy of love' that focussed on the body of the chief.

[80] Sahlins 1985: 39, fn. 9.

[81] Bingham 184; Stewart 1830: 118–9.

[82] Sissons 2014: 97–8 for suggestions of replacements for the Makahiki.

[83] There are a few comments that his royal status was suffering: Kashay 2008: 29. Also see Thurston 1882: 33, 36; Kotzebue 1830: 203, but see Dampier 1971: 42 on Liholiho as a great favourite with his people.

[84] See, for example, Robert Dampier's (1971: 54) remark in 1825: 'It was astonishing to perceive with what duty and reverence the people looked upon Kaahumanu. Her will was a perfect law.'

[85] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 67.

immediately eradicated by an alteration in the structure of official ideology.[86] Nowhere else in Polynesia had the *ali'i* been detached from the common mass so completely and for so long.[87] This is a reminder not to reduce sensations of status to the application of ideas but to acknowledge how even something like the continuing impressiveness of chiefly bodies – still towering and fat, still bedecked in the finest of apparel – would have commanded acquiescence. Part of the answer must also lie in the continuing fact of social dominance. The idea of chiefly divinity was one element of a dense network of mutually supporting ideas, patterns of behaviour, institutions and political dynamics, many of which remained in place. The chiefs were not just the landholders but the ground upon which all else was seen to be dependent.[88] The commoners had no independent forms of solidarity or mobilisation or identification: Their lives were measured and formed in relation to their chiefs.[89]

There is, however, one strong piece of evidence that some chiefs had begun to worry about the lack of ideological underpinnings. It concerns Kalanimoku, who had been charged with overseeing the business of government for many years and whom we now find fretting over the longer-term durability of the political fabric. The clue comes via Otto von Kotzebue, who seems to have had a close association with and great respect for Kalanimoku.[90] In some ways, Kotzebue is disadvantaged as a source, given that he was only a visitor to the islands and constrained by the need for an interpreter. He was also driven by an antipathy to missionaries, although this is also potentially valuable insofar as he does not share their embarrassment over the reasons of state implicated in the conversion.

Now, Kalanimoku, or William Pitt, had from the very start of the process of abolition been inclined to consider the merits of Christianity, as we saw with his decision to undergo a Catholic baptism in August 1819.[91] His reasoning was never far from the political.[92] It was Kalanimoku who had led and urged the chiefs to make a

[86] See Sissons 2014 for a discussion of habitus in a Polynesian context.
[87] Ralston 1984: 37–8. [88] Mykkänen 2003: 57, 60 157–8.
[89] Marshall Sahlins (p.c. 20/2/2013): The commoners 'were entirely dependent on chiefs, on whom they calqued their own existence.'
[90] Kotzebue 1830: 161, 228; Marin's journal in Gast and Conrad, eds. 2002: 102–3.
[91] *MH* June 1821, 17, 6, pp. 173–4. [92] Kotzebue 1830: 201, 208–9.

public announcement of their conversion and the consequent reformation of the nation at a public meeting in April 1824.[93] 'This should have been done before but for the dissipation and distracting influence of the king, roving about, hurrying from place to place, and diverting the attention of the people,' he said. In fact, while Liholiho had suffered most from the desacralisation process, this was not such a pressing concern for the high chiefs around him who held the reins of power. A havering and insubstantial monarch served some (not all) of their purposes. But now he was removed, it rendered the position of Ka'ahumanu and her people more conspicuous, and the question of the ideological foundation of rule more pressing.

When Kotzebue met Kalanimoku in January 1825, the latter claimed that he had advised Liholiho against the abolition, contrary to our other sources.[94] Kalanimoku's voice comes through Kotzebue's remark that Liholiho had overthrown religion for selfish reasons, 'relieving himself and his subjects from ceremonies which he considered useless, because he undervalued the precepts of morality interwoven with them, and for the sake of which his father had always conscientiously observed them'.[95] Indeed, Kotzebue found the old chief – the thankful hero of the battle of Waimea, remember – wondering whether the new faith would be enough:

> Our present belief ... is preferable to that which it has supplanted; but the inhabitants of the mountains cannot understand its superiority; and strong measures are necessary to prevent their relapsing into idolatry. The king should not have so suddenly annihilated all that they held sacred. As a first consequence, he has been obliged to seek for safety in a foreign country. How it all will end, I cannot foresee; but I look forward with fear.[96]

Perhaps Kalanimoku had entered a fretful stage of life, and George Kaumuali'i's recent rebellion had shaken his bones.[97] But we may credit his sense that the political implications of the cultural revolution had not entirely been grasped at the time and were now making themselves felt.

[93] Bingham 212. [94] Kalanimoku is misrepresenting his 1819 role here, I think.
[95] Kotzebue 1830: 197. That Kalanimoku was the source for the account of the abolition comes through in his starring role in defending the country (199).
[96] Bingham 229; Mykkänen 2003: 59.
[97] He had also spent too much time stricken with illness of late, as had many chiefs: Byron 1826: 148.

In an official sense, the new religion did not re-divinise the high chiefs, sanctifying them instead in the righteous mode – but the difference was not necessarily noted with care in the popular mind. It was the chiefs who took centre stage in the new enterprise.[98] ʻĪʻī tells us that, ʻKaʻahumanu was indeed a mother to all of her people, in that she went around first one island and then another to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. All of her people who followed it were blessed.'[99] These journeys of the 'New Kaʻahumanu', as she was known, were a Christianised version of her iconoclastic tour of 1823: They conveyed her mastery in no uncertain terms, now through the exhibition of reading and writing, the dedication of churches and the advertisement of moral prohibitions.[100]

A New Moral Order

Chiefs wanted to be the first, but they also had to be the first.[101] It was widely reported by missionaries that everyone referred the question of their conversion to the *aliʻi* and to the king in particular.[102] This was not an off-hand procrastination but an expression of a genuine sociological fact, which was soon made plain once the chiefly mandate was forthcoming. As the commoners came to attend schools and services, there was an element of coercion but also aspirational imitation and obedience according to a deeply lodged principle of hierarchy.[103] It is, then, entirely inadequate to describe this as the result of the 'top-down strategy' of the missionaries.[104] Indeed the realisation of what was happening could be borne in on them with a dismaying force, for what could such communal expressions of duty to their secular lords signify of the inner sanctum of the spirit?[105]

[98] Mykkänen 2003: 79.

[99] ʻĪʻī 157–8.

[100] See, for example, Bingham 293–5 for the first tour in July and August 1826. See also Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 71, 172.

[101] Thurston 1882: 42; compare Tahiti in Davies 171, 175.

[102] Ellis 41, 314, 318; Mathison 1825: 372; Tyerman to Bruder, 10 August 1822, Oahoo, CWM/LMS South Seas; see also Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 67.

[103] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 70–3; Mykkänen 2003: 57, 60, 78; Kotzebue 1830: 259–61.

[104] Sahlins 1985: 39 on a 'great regularity or law of conversion valid for the Polynesian heroic polities'.

[105] Hence Bingham at various times denies that top-down conversion was needed (179), complains about its superficial results (211) or vainly denies its fact (281). See also Daws 1968: 97–8.

The rapid extension of schools and churches could not outstrip a tremendous appetite for literacy.[106] But this is not to qualify the extent to which they formed 'the privileged mode of disseminating the new Ka'ahumanu regime', as Sahlins has argued.[107] So rapidly were they rolled out that native teachers had to play the leading role. As with Afonso's scheme of Christianisation in early sixteenth-century Kongo, this scheme ballooned well beyond the agency of the European missionaries and created institutions dominated by chiefs and their entourages in the first instance.[108] Christianity provided an institutional means for distributing trusted subordinates and new discourses of legitimisation both. What Kalanimoku had mourned of the old religion was not just the particularly exalted status of chiefs but a more encompassing vision of religion's centrality to the social order, all that the *kapu* had sought to maintain.[109] In short, the Hawaiian chiefs were evidently moved by the third element of the ruler conversion model, entirely conscious of the social power that Christianity placed at their disposal.

As elsewhere in Polynesia, the Protestant missionaries, brought up on a severely transcendentalist separation of church and state, could only contemplate the consequences with a good deal of angst.[110] Yet, as *Unearthly Patterns* argued, it is precisely such detachment from mundane affairs that lends transcendentalism the authority to call mundane affairs to account. At least this logic was irresistible to Hiram Bingham on 3 February 1822, as he proclaimed from the pulpit, 'Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth.'[111] If some Hawaiian chiefs thought they would be rid of 'turbulent priests', they were quite wrong, and many European observers remarked their influence with dismay. The young Robert Dampier noted 'a Mr. Bingham, the most methodistical looking gentleman

[106] These soon covered a third of the population: Bingham 215, 256–8, 272, 298.
[107] Sahlins 1981; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 67: The missionaries and the chiefs 'were able to cooperate inasmuch as for the first, political power was the convenient means for propagating their religion, while for the second, religion was the traditional means of propagating their power'. Also Mykkänen 2003: 53–6.
[108] Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 91–3. [109] Daws 1968: 66.
[110] Though Dibble 95 sees the matter quite plainly, see anxieties of Ellis 48; Bingham 149, 213, 269, 178, 299, 303. Mykkänen 2003: 9–10, 63–7, 85–6 on the intellectual background of the missionaries.
[111] *MH* 19 June 1822, p. 182; Mykkänen 2003: 77.

I ever beheld', whispering in Kalanimoku's ear as to the propriety of beginning their meeting with a prayer.[112]

Bingham could not resist making the point of George Kaumuali'i's rebellion that 'a thorough extension of school instruction through all the districts at that time would have been a better safeguard against insurrection than the displays of guns and bayonets, in terrorem on the ramparts of a fortification'.[113] He ended up arguing that though the state was not a Church, it was in an important sense a religious institution, and God's laws should become the foundation of the actual laws of the land. This is what he and the chiefs had set about doing, insisting on the moral reformation of subjectivity as the foundation of dutiful subjects.[114] This amounted to nothing less that the reconstitution of the *kapu*; indeed the missionaries promoted the language of *kapu* from the start.[115] Those European and American whalers, sailors and merchants who fiercely resented the sudden imposition of puritan morality on the sexual economy of Hawaii were referred to as the 'anti-tabu party'! (The women, they groaned, had been 'tabued'.)[116] Both chiefs and missionaries saw themselves as re-imposing a religious basis for societal discipline that the abolition had cast away.

This point is well established in the historiography but is worth underlining for comparative purposes because it allows us to understand why the unusually strict standards of behaviour and commitment demanded by the Calvinist missionaries did not obstruct ruler conversion. Such severity did indeed string out the process, hold back both Liholiho and Ka'ahumanu, and lead to various forms of resistance afterwards. But it also provided a degree of conceptual and institutional continuity with the old regime, as these two religious systems

[112] Dampier 1971: 36; Kotzebue 1830: 254–5. Meanwhile Bingham (280): rulers 'needed useful hints and valuable information in respect to their duty ... and it was the more important that missionaries should be communicative, able and ready to show them what was right'.

[113] Bingham 228.

[114] Bingham 278–82, 295, 300. See also Mykkänen 2003: 91–4; Kashay 2008: 30–2; Daws 1968: 72.

[115] Bingham 89, 112; Byron 1826: 146–7; Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 72–3; Mykkänen 2003: 37. The term also retained its meaning of an individual political prohibition: Bingham 136, 234. The Hawaiian chiefs had received a great lesson in the ability of Christian *kapu* to impose order in managing the aftermath of Liholiho's death: Bingham 261–2.

[116] Bingham 283–6. See Arista 2018, ch. 4 for a new discussion of the *kapu* against Hawaiian women visiting foreign ships.

occupying opposite ends of the immanentism–transcendentalism spectrum found a strange meeting point in the arena of social power. The difference was that with the Hawaiian system, the sin could only be manifest in action and was purchased in the coin of immanent justice, while in the Calvinist understanding the sin registered first and most deeply in the soul and was paid for in the afterlife.[117] Still, Bingham seems to have almost relished the opportunity to draw on the disciplinary attitudes bequeathed by the old regime. Upon such heathen foundations an island of puritan grace would rise up above a sea of iniquity, certainly purer than the dissolution to be found back home.

Without some indigenous mechanism in operation, it is difficult to explain the comprehensiveness of the transition, which exasperated resident foreigners and surprised visitors.[118] Kotzebue provides the most dramatic picture, coloured by his anger towards the bigotries of the missionary enterprise, its hatred of natural human pleasure.[119] On returning to the island in September 1825 after an absence of some eight or nine months, he remarked that 'we might have imagined ourselves in a different country'. 'The inhabitants of every house or hut in Hanaruro [Honolulu] are compelled by authority to an almost endless routine of prayers … The streets formerly so full of life and animation are now deserted; games of all kinds, even the most innocent are sternly prohibited; singing is a punishable offence.'[120] He sees families bivouacking in the streets, with the spelling-books in their hands, or crowded into the new schools. 'That a people so lively should readily submit to such gloomy restrictions at the command of their rulers.'

This was not a scene conducive to the warrior exploits of old. Christianity offered an ideology of kingship entirely in accord with the unprecedented peace that had broken out during Kamehameha's reign.[121] In its reference to the divine, kingship did not need to encompass the movement between the wild and the domesticated, but could come to rest on the latter pole. In ideal terms, it would remain perfectly euphemised, statically righteous. Human sacrifice now represented not

[117] The missionaries found it difficult to move popular understandings from the former to the latter.

[118] For example, Dampier 1971: 36.

[119] Thomas 2010: 106.

[120] Kotzebue 1830: 255–8. This is also quoted at length in Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 70.

[121] Kotzebue 1821: 246. See D'Arcy 2003 on the internal pre-Christian roots of demilitarisation.

the essence of kingship but its antithesis. In the most practical of terms, this meant that there was a new moral value accorded to restraint in warfare, which was carried out, we are told, in the victory over George Kaumualiʻi's insurrection.[122] The chiefs had asked about the relevant Christian teachings and were instructed in the importance of leniency in victory, which they apparently applied. Kalanimoku sent the defeated chiefs to learn the new learning.[123] Over Kauaʻi was placed a new governor who restored quietude and favoured 'the cause of instruction and true religion – the only safe-guards of the peace of the state'.[124] Any urge for rebellion in the future would find no reply in the heavens.[125]

The stern disapproval extended to alcohol was also useful in restoring order: The missionaries had brought the solution to the foreigners' own disease.[126] The chiefs had seen the deleterious effects in Liholiho himself and already begun to see Christianity as one of the few means of dealing with it.[127] That the widespread drunkenness could be seen as a matter of social and political disorder is indicated by William Ellis's argument with a priestess of Pele, who stopped him in his tracks by listing the chiefs who had died because of the foreigners: 'Their diseases and their rum have destroyed more of the king's men than all the volcanoes on the island.'[128]

A further advantage of the new form of moral discipline is that it appealed to the deity and nominal *kapu* system of the foreigners, and the foreigners had become increasingly troublesome.[129] The

[122] It is difficult to assess how far missionaries were really in a position to ascertain previous practices. Ellis 149 shows some real research; Bingham 303 refers to a letter from John Young (27 November 1826), a long-time resident. See also Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 57; Mykkänen 2003: 53.

[123] Ellis, October 26, 1824, Huahine, CWM/LMS, South Seas; Ellis 148–9, 162; Bingham 238, 243, 249, 303.

[124] Bingham 243. [125] Ralston 1984: 38–9; Kashay 2008: 32.

[126] Kashay 2008: 28 brings out the significance of alcoholism well. On widespread inebriation, see Ellis 273, 382; Mathison 1825: 364, 469; Bingham 78; Franchêre 1854: 66; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 380; Dibble 1839: 42; Obeyesekere 1992: 156–7. Compare Tahiti: Davies 1961: 171, and 'Translation of a Letter from Pomarre, King of Otaheite, to the Rev. W. Henry', *The Evangelical Magazine*, *xx*, 1812, 281–2.

[127] Bingham: 129, 156, 180, 198; Ellis, 18 June 1823, Oʻahu, CWM/LMS, South Seas; Ellis 44, 447; Freycinet 1978: 28.

[128] Ellis 310.

[129] Underlined by Kashay 2008: 32–4, and see Daws 1968: 88, and the Journal of Marin (Gast and Conrad, eds. 2002: 93).

prohibitions against prostitution, drinking, gambling and fighting all mattered to a calling-port and watering hole like Honolulu. Moving at last into religious diplomacy, Christianity also gave Hawaiian rulers the dignity of common faith to present to grander visitors, such as the Russian Commodore Vascilieff in December 1821 or Lord Byron in 1825.[130]

There is no space here to explore what became of this suffocating new moral order. Suffice it to say that both chiefs and commoners subsequently sought to throw open the windows.[131] So many traditional aspects of Hawaiian life had been stifled. That the new status quo preserved a diarchy of some sort, with the monarch proper a male stripped of sacred potency, is evident in the acts of resistance offered by the succeeding kings, such as Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III).[132] Liholiho's (or Kamehameha II) collapsing and profane sovereignty had set a bizarre form of template.[133] Some of the details of the rebelliousness – Boki carrying with him the bones of ancient deified rulers of Hawaii during his mustering of forces in 1827, the reversion to the Makahiki celebrations or Kauikeaouli's public coupling with his sister Nahienaena – evoked the lost sacred world.[134] But in a strange way the reassertion of *kapu*, now Christian and female, had associated male kingship with the secular and the dissipated. In fact, no really determined political opposition was forthcoming, nor was there any real organised resurgence of indigenous religion. There was one movement associated with the dead prophetess Hapu, analogous to other Pacific syncretic-millenarian cults in its appropriation of Christian authority and dreams of salvation for a more immanent and indigenous end. But it presented little threat.[135] The gods were impotent.[136]

[130] Bingham 150.
[131] See Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 74–6; Daws 1968: 83–6, 92–3.
[132] Valeri 1985: 128.
[133] On the male kingship role as determined by structural inversions: Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 120–5.
[134] Ralston 1985: 321.
[135] Dibble 1839: 104–10. Ralston 1985: 316, argues that despite the many political tensions of the 1820s and 1830s, 'No organised resistance either of a secular, political or of a religious, salvationist nature developed.'
[136] And continued to be disconfirmed. After one failed uprising in 1831, a rebel was heard to say that 'the Hawaii gods were silent and therefore could do no harm' (Kirch and Sahlins 1993: 76).

Conclusion

With the luxury of the comparable riches of nineteenth-century evidence, it becomes possible to see how the smaller details of personalities and events may have swayed the course of history: the awa-addled Hewahewa, high priest of Kū; the radical ambition of Ka'ahumanu; the capitulation of Liholiho … who did not even actually convert, recall: He simply succumbed to measles in London, and only then were the final steps taken towards the Christianisation of Hawaii. But such considerations do not give rise to convincing counter-factual scenarios of non-conversion. Hewahewa was only acting as other high priests in Polynesia had done and would do. Liholiho himself was already leaning to Christianity, and was perhaps only deterred by Ka'ahumanu's hijacking of it and his youthful unwillingness to let go of simple pleasures. Indeed, the main reason why the process was so drawn out was the unusually severe standards of the Calvinist missionaries. Underneath their self-regarding narrative of struggle, the rapid and powerful Christianisation of the Hawaiian ruling chiefs was underway well before Liholiho left his subjects for the last time.

The peculiar disaggregation of abolition and conversion in the Hawaiian case allows us to see certain vulnerabilities to the immanentist institutions of state cult and divinised kingship, exacerbated by a combination of two intense and interlinked developments: the sudden shift to the politics of pacification and unification and a no less sudden exposure to the forces unleashed by contact with the new foreign presence.[137] The structures that allow the accumulation of power within one form of social life may become inhibitory to the next.[138] So complete was the investment of religion in the status quo that its predication on war had become a problem in a context of peace. And if the Hawaiian *ali'i nui* were pushed high into the realm of the gods, it was atop a pyramid of broadly diffused divinisation among the *ali'i* as a whole, while the logic of such a purely immanentist principle as *mana* meant that opponents riding the crest of the heroic mode of status accumulation might always threaten to reach their level. This was not yet a sensibility of stable kingship. In the end, access to

[137] As has long been recognised: Webb 1965: 25; Redfield 1953; Levin 1968: 427.
[138] This line of reasoning was fully explored in analyses from the 1960s/1970s. See Chapter 7, footnote 16.

supernatural power was too broadly diffused both socially and geographically.

There were pressures for the person of the king and the *ali'i* as a whole to be partially desacralised and for cult structures to be subjected to iconoclasms – remember Ka'ahumanu's tour of 1822 before she had yielded to missionary demands – which were only *subsequently* advanced by full-blown conversion to Christianity. Elsewhere in the Pacific, the pursuit of royal centralisation remained sublimated in religion, much as chapels swiftly replaced *marae* and Bibles replaced red feathers as the tokens of chiefly *mana*.[139] It is telling that in Hawaii, the great communal labours to reconstruct chiefly authority in the landscape were rather directed towards producing palatial residences. Royal authority proceeded as itself for a little while, undisguised by the sacred, coasting on habitus and habillement, before it participated in the Polynesian conjuncture of resacralisation.

The religious systems of Polynesia, and its most evocative features of *kapu* and *mana*, had formed highly effective means of creating order and hierarchy. Yet it was precisely those features that gave it so much force – its holistic relevance to every aspect of life and its appeal to immanent demonstrations of divine power – that ultimately proved its undoing. The intuition that Polynesian cultures constituted tightly woven balls rendered the prospect of ruler conversion improbable to some observers.[140] But it also meant that if just a few strings were tugged loose, the whole thing might unravel.[141] In fact, the cat's claws flashed from many directions.[142]

[139] See Sissons 2014, for example, 96–9.

[140] Gunson 1978: 208.

[141] Belich 1996: 110 makes a related point: 'If social, natural and supernatural worlds interlocked, then surely changes in one required corresponding changes in the others.'

[142] To construe in the analytical terms advanced by d'Avray 2010: 'Value rationalities' are sustained by the fact that any one assumption is only part of an interlocking set of convictions. A logical/empirical attack through instrumental rationality on any one principle is therefore likely to fail because of the implausibility of the whole ensemble being mistaken. It is only when many of the cognitive struts are weakened at the same time that it may begin to collapse. Hence a plausible explanation of the 1819 abolition will consider changes in many areas of life, rather than isolating any one field as the 'critical factor'. It is therefore unnecessary for Kuper 1999: 189 and some of the contributors to the 1960s and 1970s debates to discount particular causes that fail to account for all of the facts.

When the *kapu* began to be defied, the threat of immanent reprisal too was placed at risk. Polynesians were faced with foreigners whose access to powers over life and death only grew more impressive, who did not themselves recognise the *kapu* in the slightest and whose presence pulled people out of their allotted roles. Crucially, once missionaries arrived, Hawaiians were faced with outsiders and converts who set out to provoke and defy the gods in the most blatant manner possible.[143] The gods failed to react; just as they failed to react to the devastating impact of disease. Across Polynesia too, there are signs that chiefs were already inclined to question the efficacy of their innumerable metapersons.[144] They made this into an experimental matter, proving their superiority to the gods in moments of high drama, at communal feasts, by eating sacred animals or with women, or by knocking effigies off their perches or by pouring scorn into the vast and seething mouths of live volcanoes.[145] Such acts of defiance, together with signs of victory for the new god, had the capacity to spark popular movements of auto-iconoclasm, in which *kapu* objects were destroyed by the communities that had venerated them, and which were only fuelled rather than formed by Christian discourse.[146]

In Hawaii, as everywhere, healing and war were the most important arenas in which the competition of ritual efficacy took place. Kamehameha the Great had proudly connected his unique ascendancy with the favour of the gods; when his priestly healers failed, as they had failed many others, and he died, Liholiho accused the gods of 'impotency or neglect', just before the abolition. The first unbending of his wife and de facto successor, Ka'ahumanu, was effected by healing prayer in December 1821. As for war, it was victory for the fledgling regime at the battle of Kuamo'o in 1819 that set off the first public rejection of the public religion through iconoclasm and victory at the battle of Waimea in August of 1824 that finally brought Ka'ahumanu to the baptismal font.

[143] See also Linnekin 2004: 190; Gunson 1978: 209; Hooper 2006: 41; Tyerman and Bennet 1831: 507 (extracts from letters by the two native teachers).
[144] On Finau in Tonga: Cummins 1977: 78.
[145] Also see Swain and Trompf 1995: 209–10 on disconfirmation.
[146] For New Zealand, where independent non-Christian prophetic movements sprang up in the mid-nineteenth century drawing on the appeal of destroying tabu objects, see Belich 1996: 220.

As warrior and state cults were cast off, so the status of prophets rose.[147] Always associated with a kind of detachment from the status quo, it was prophetic figures who presented the biggest challenge to Christianity in the early years of its establishment and who also shouldered the task of interpreting and sometimes appropriating the potency of the new cult for the purposes of indigenous resistance.[148]

Meanwhile, the conjuncture called for statehood, and quickly: for power centralised, violence monopolised, subjects pacified, borders defined and property secured, for a polity able to meet the looming outside world on its own terms. Kamehameha had managed to straddle both worlds, catching the spears thrown at him during the *kāliʻi* rite in the Makahiki festival, while wielding the pen over barrels of pork with the merchants of Honolulu.[149] But it was pen-flourishers who were destined to prosper over spear-catchers. Indeed, the association between the popularity of literacy and that of Christianity is nowhere more evident than in Hawaii. Secular and biblical forms of learning were closely associated, and the missionaries benefited hugely from their monopolisation of the means and will to teach them.

When the decision was taken to convert, the very features that had rendered divinised kingship so formidable an opponent of Christianity now rendered it the most formidable ally.[150] The more that public religious life was consolidated under a divinised ruler, the more quickly and completely conversion might roll downwards in the way that missionaries had always fantasised about. Dibble was on to something when he claimed that, despite Kamehameha's resolute paganism, he seemed the agent of divine Providence in his feats of unification.[151] Kings had resided at the pinnacle of priestly hierarchies, which showed little capacity for rear-guard resistance.[152]

None of this implies that either secularised rule or the quasi-secularised and partially re-sacralised version offered by Christianity are the inevitable products of the convulsions of state formation.[153]

[147] Oliver 1974: 1334 on Tahiti.
[148] Compare the prophetic movements in New Zealand; see Belich 1996: 221.
[149] Corney 1896: 101; Valeri 1985: 211.
[150] Latukefu 59; Linnekin 2004: 216. [151] Dibble 1839: 58–60.
[152] In three Polynesian cases the high priests acted as the alter egos of converting kings (or vice versa).
[153] The argument here does not depend on an evolutionary or teleological model of the relationship between ideology and state construction. See Harfst 1972.

Left to its own devices, the immanentist system in Hawaii may well have solved its problems; many empire-builders elsewhere had done this with great success. But Hawaii was not left to its own devices: Christianity arrived, associated with foreign forms of political and religious life that seemed to swim with the tide of the new forces the archipelago now faced. Nor is it necessary to envisage an evolutionary march to inherently stable political forms, only key players for whom the status quo seemed unsustainable. The aftermath of 1819 was so unsatisfactory that it was only a few years before kingship was re-sacralised. Transcendentalism may squash political opposition insofar as it suppresses or relativises other materialisations of supernatural potency, but it merely creates its own criteria – truth, ethics, salvation – around which resistance may coagulate. The inevitable conflicts produced by any political system therefore become channelled, to some extent, through the proliferating tribalisms of Christianity.

HAWAII

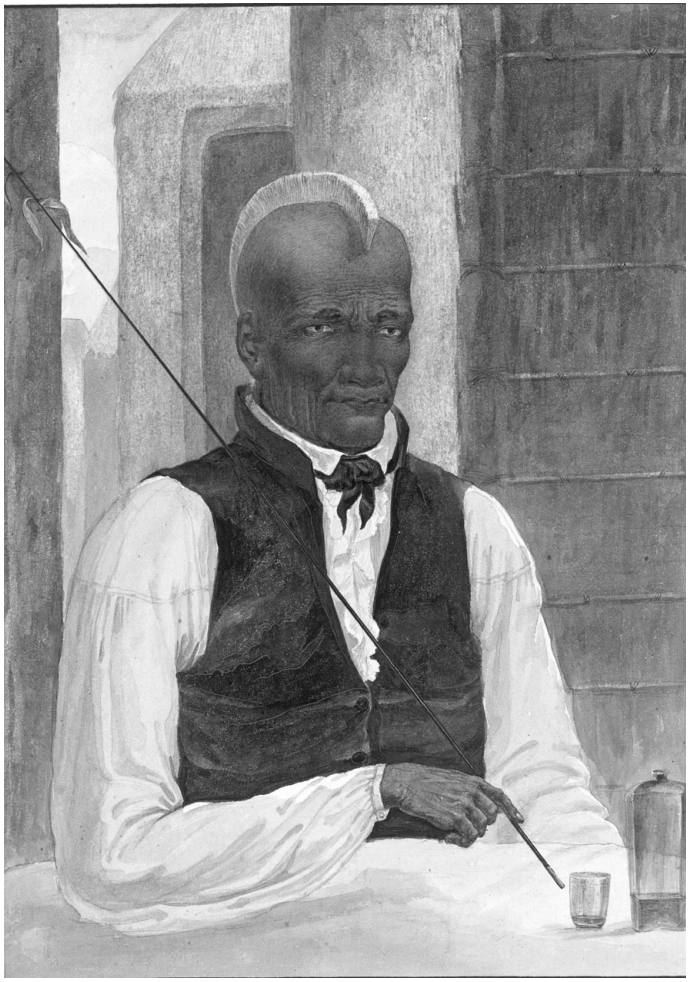
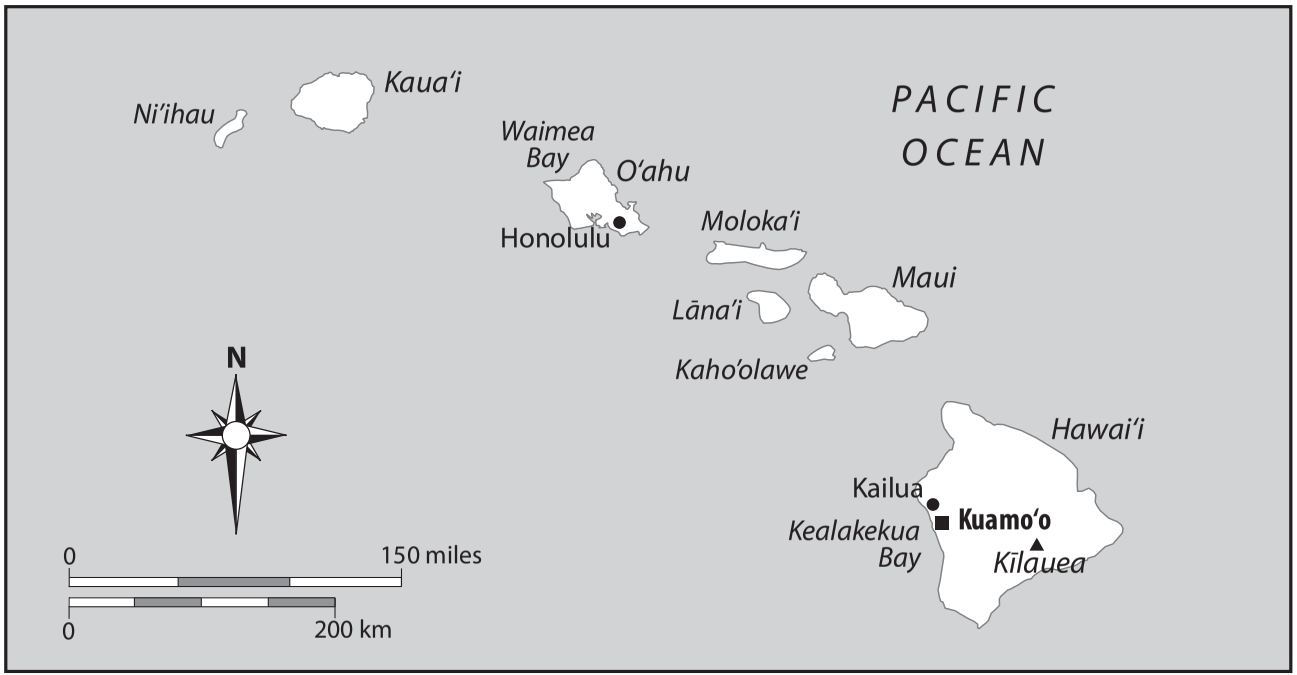


Figure 7.1 Kamehameha, 1818. 'Tamehameha – Roi of Sandwich Islands.' Mikhail Tikhanov, 1818. Courtesy of Scientific–Research Museum of the Russian Academy of Arts (P–2109). Kamehameha's haircut is an expression of mourning following the death of a sister. He himself would die the following year.



Map 7.1 Hawaii.
Map by David McCutcheon.

PART III

Global Patterns

9 *Hinduism and Confucianism and the Question of Transcendence*

Material relating to societies shaped by Hinduism and Confucianism was certainly drawn upon in *Unearthly Powers*, but the relationship of these traditions to the construct of transcendentalism was left rather open. The purpose of this chapter is to suggest how they might work within the paradigm. It functions then as a more theoretical interlude coming after the case studies but with a view to allowing us to bring South and East Asian history fully within an analysis of the global patterns in the final chapter.

In each of the Axial Age cases of West Asia, South Asia and East Asia, transcendentalism emerged in two ways: First, it was folded within a continuously evolving framework of much older lineage, and, second, it took a more radical form in 'secondary breakthroughs' that repudiated that lineage. That is to say, from a position of extreme distance, it would appear that Judaism is to Christianity as Confucianism is to Mohism/Daoism and Hinduism is to Buddhism/Jainism. In each of these cases, the first of these pairs represents a broad tradition that maintained substantial continuity with the pre-Axial past but had to redefine itself against the eruption of the second.[1]

Hinduism

Hinduism – or in some ways it may be better to say Brahmanism – was transformed by both absorbing transcendentalism and rejecting more emphatic rival articulations of it.[2] Hence, in *Unearthly Powers*, Hinduism and Jainism were included in a broader category of 'Indic

[1] Boyarin 2018 emphasises Judaism's emergence as 'a religion' through a long process of mutual contradistinction with Christianity. Confucianism emerged around the same time as, and partly in response to, Mohism and Daoism but was framed in terms of continuity with a much older tradition.

[2] McGovern 2018 emphasises Brahmanism's (or 'Neo-Brahmanism's') emergence through contrast with Buddhism and Jainism.

religions' that represented one of the two major forms that transcendentalism could take.[3] At the same time, Buddhism's 'axiality' was described as a reaction against elements of Brahmanic thought and practice that represented profound continuity with immanentism tout court.[4] Rather than look to the offensive revelations of a single individual, Brahmanism's authority came from the very timelessness and non-human authorship of the Veda.[5] Although the Veda was a canonised set of 'texts', it formed a vast accumulation of teachings and narratives that stretched back to profoundly pre-Axial origins.[6] It did not convey, therefore, a single set of doctrines or an overarching vision. Brahmanism rather endured through the capacity of the deeply immanentist mechanisms of endogamy, ritual observance and purity taboo to establish group identity. This immediately brings to mind Judaism, except that the core identity thus constituted was not a chosen people but a status elite, the Brahmins themselves, whose position entailed indeed the whole hierarchical *varna* structure of society.[7] Their origins as ritual specialists par excellence remained fundamental to this status.

Brahmanism therefore remained fully compatible with and conceptually able to absorb a mélange of devotional enthusiasms, ritual practices, philosophies and cosmologies that has long been felt to defy categorisation as a whole.[8] This included theistic cults (to Śiva and Viṣṇu, for example), which were, in a sense, quite extrinsic to its core ideology.[9] If Brahmins may be compared with other transcendentalist clerisies through their role as guardians and exegetes of canonised

[3] The other being Abrahamic monotheism.

[4] This is in line with other interpretations of Buddhism as more emphatically or disruptively 'Axial', even if, as McGovern 2018 argues, Buddhists originally saw themselves as true *brahmācaryas*, while Brahmanism was a self-conscious reassertion of the householder lifestyle and birth against radical renouncerhood.

[5] Bronkhorst 2016: 405. Although this distinguishes Brahmanism from other transcendentalist traditions, it could also lead to more transcendent understandings of the Vedas themselves – as truly eternal, divine. Fisher 2017: 40.

[6] For a long period before being set down in writing, Brahmanic teachings were passed down orally (and afterwards oral recitation remained important).

[7] This point is not related to the hostile equation of Jews and Brahmins made by some early modern Christians (Xavier 2011: 256), even if they correctly noted how both resisted conversion.

[8] No quotation marks applied to 'Hinduism' in deference to the reasoning of Sweetman 2003: 49–51, and note Pomplun et al. 2020. This is not to assert simple continuity between pre-modern and modern instantiations of Hinduism (O'Hanlon 2013: 777–9).

[9] Bronkhorst 2016: 24–5.

teaching, they remain distinct by virtue of the fact that their status was ascriptive and orthopraxic. The Brahmin class as a whole did not then constitute anything like a 'church' or a 'sangha'; rather, equivalent institutional networks and movements were formed by distinct subgroups of Brahmins and other virtuosi.

The most revolutionary development that Brahmanism had to absorb was the way of the renouncer. But if, to begin with, the *śramaṇa* vision represented almost an existential threat, it came to underpin Upaniṣadic no less than Buddhist or Jain teachings. There remains much disagreement about the chronology and therefore causality of this phenomenon, which need not detain us here. It may be that elements of the renouncer's world view had developed within Brahmin communities drawing on certain tendencies already implicit in the societal detachment of their role or that it represented an irruption from the Greater Magadha region to the east of the Brahmanic heartlands.[10] Either way, it became what is surely the definitive feature of India's Axial Age, a milieu characterised by exceptional intellectual openness, second-order thinking, scepticism and pitched debate, just as in the case of Ancient Greece and China.[11]

The new class of renouncers did not consist simply of philosophers; they were driven by a new goal: escape from existence and especially from the wheel of rebirths ordained by karmic retribution. In the Upaniṣads, the attainment of this liberation (or *mokṣa*) was understood as the realisation of *brahman*, the infinite, unchanging, ultimate essence of reality. The *brahman* was identified with the Self (*ātman*), a principle no less ineffable than that of Buddhist nirvana, 'about which one can only say "not –", "not –"'.[12] This was the transcendent realm that differed from the surface realities of existence – even if, like many forms of Asian transcendentalism, it could be understood theoretically in monistic terms.[13] As such, it constituted a kind of monopolisation of

[10] Heesterman (1986: 393–406) sees a crucial form of transcendentalism already present in Vedic ritualism; McGovern 2018: 220 argues that early Jains and Buddhists were an avant-garde who 'took earlier speculations on karma and rebirth . . . to an extreme conclusion'; Bronkhorst 2016 locates the impetus for renouncer ideology in the distinct culture of Greater Magadha. Also see Kulke 1986: 382; Pollock 2005: 401.

[11] Bronkhorst 2016: 256. [12] Bellah 2011: 518.

[13] The somewhat paradoxical way in which transcendentalist traditions yield forms of monism while remaining functionally transcendentalist must be dealt with elsewhere, but see *UP*103–4.

the sphere of divinity, albeit in an entirely different way to monotheism. Rather than seeking to exclude all other forms of supernatural agency, it merely rendered them refractions of a transcendent principle. This would be an enduring feature of Hinduism: the notion that at lower levels of comprehension there may be legions of human-like supernatural entities, but at the highest level, whether represented as *ātman*, *brahman* or Śiva, there was an entity that outstripped all the limitations of the human imagination.

A deep individualisation of religious life followed, locating 'the problem of the human condition, of human suffering, within the individual heart and mind', as Wendy Doniger puts it.[14] This was linked to a certain ethicisation conveyed through principles of karma, merit and rebirth that are very broadly shared with Buddhism. Although the ethical implications of the concept of *dharma* are debated by scholars, it is telling that violence was seen as not only destructive of order but of the individual's soteriological progress.[15] The practice of ritual sacrifice was problematised as it became subject to rationalised scrutiny, the desire for greater meaning and the imperative of liberation.[16] The renouncers had a message to impart to courts and lay society in general, and it was counter-intuitive, disparaging surface reality.[17] 'Emancipated from the relations which govern [the world]', the realm of pious action moved correspondingly from that of ritual to that of knowledge.[18] Theirs was, in short, an 'offensive' vision of truth, ethics and soteriology.

However, Brahmanism incorporated this Axial revolution while also taming and containing it within a paradigm that sanctified the hierarchical ordering of society.[19] The most extraordinary aspect of this vision was that Brahmins themselves occupied its commanding heights rather than the Kshatriya class who held all the temporal force at their disposal (or indeed the merchants who held the wealth). And yet this emphatically self-serving vision was integrated into the emotional and

[14] Doniger 2009: 172.
[15] In Bellah's analysis (2011: 514–21), *dharma* remained close simply to 'order', although the ethical dimensions are surely important. Note Obeyesekere 2002: 111 on muted ethicisation in the Upaniṣads.
[16] Heesterman 1986: 400; Shulman 2005: 371–2.
[17] Kulke 1986: 390.
[18] Heesterman, cited in Bronkhorst 2016: 243.
[19] For Bronkhorst (2016: 255), Brahmanism was 'a strong force toward de-individualisation in early India'.

cognitive lives of whole societies. Royal courts in particular, across a vast stretch of the world from what is now Pakistan to Java, adopted Brahmins and elements of the 'Sanskrit imaginaire' they propagated.

How did this happen? The power of Brahmanism appears to lie in a particularly powerful and distinctive fusion of purity and soteriology. A sensibility of purity rooted in an evolved disgust response has been a fundamental means of organising productive relations with metapersons in immanentist traditions.[20] Transcendentalist traditions tend to subvert pre-existing purity regulations (flagrantly embracing the impure) while themselves drawing upon underlying purity/disgust instincts in order to concretise soteriological progress.[21] Hinduism, however, more than any other tradition, placed such instincts at the heart of its soteriology and rooted them in endogamy and lineage.[22] Brahmins were no longer merely sacred in the way that any ritual specialist is (being set apart from humanity and closer to the gods – a role in which kings too could share) but also by virtue of their relationship to a higher truth to which kings were subject no less than slaves. The capacity of Brahmins to convince warriors and kings of the importance of merit, rebirth and liberation is surely fundamental to making sense of the historical record.[23]

At the same time, Brahmins' status as ritual specialists represented a more immediate and no less important advantage when it came to attracting the favour of rajas and warriors. They advertised compelling claims of unique access to immanent power, whether through more ad hoc magical solutions (as in the *Atharvaveda*) or the most elaborate edifices of court ceremonial.[24] As scholars, meanwhile – just like Buddhist monks, Christian priests or Muslim ulema – Brahmins also brought learning, poetic and epic literature, statecraft, legal expertise, diplomatic connections and cosmopolitan reach to the courts who patronised them.[25]

However, viewed as a strategy for obtaining hegemony over the social, political and religious field, the core logic of the hierarchical

[20] Larson 2016: 135–42 and passim, for Ancient Greece.
[21] Thanks to Joan-Pau Rubiés for this point, who notes, in Christianity: baptism, confession, virginity, celibacy.
[22] Bronkhorst 2016: 6, fn. 10. On purity in the cognitive science of religion: Larson 2016: 135–42.
[23] Bronkhorst 2016: 408. [24] Bronkhorst 2016: 224–6, 405.
[25] *UP* 240 refers to these as features of transcendentalist clerisies generically attractive to royal courts.

vision of Brahmanism was a source of weakness as well as strength. Quite simply, all those occupying a position beneath the Brahmins in their vision, from kings to outcastes, had obvious motives for ignoring, escaping, twisting, stretching or contradicting it. In particular, as much academic commentary has emphasised, purity status was a matter of perspective and politics as much as any rigid application of the *varna* code; Brahmanisation was a process that was always incomplete and contested. The set apartness of Brahmins meant that Śūdras and outcastes could be left to their own religious lives, with their own temples and ritual specialists. Where local cults were absorbed within a Brahmanic frame, this might only impinge on the experience of participants lightly, if at all. Vast swathes of religious life across South Asia remained fundamentally in immanentist mode. Brahmins frequently took a hermetic stance, in which it became unnecessary to bother the lower castes with the higher mysteries.

Just as the attempt of Confucianism to fix society into a stable hierarchy stimulated popular salvationist movements that relativised its premises, so Brahmanism stimulated popular salvationist movements that rejected the logic of caste. These brought a new immediacy and egalitarianism to the quest for liberation. The most important movement here would be *bhakti*, which represents a quite distinct propulsion of transcendentalism insofar as it was predicated on neither the path of knowledge nor that of ascetism.[26] Instead it took the form of a direct, personal relationship with God. *Bhakti* was thus akin to the emergence of theist devotionalism in Mahayana Buddhism, throwing open the doors of salvation to everyone regardless of either ascetic lifestyle or exalted birth. Some anti-Brahmanical movements, then, may be seen as reforms of transcendentalism, in the sense that they expand the societal relevance of soteriology.

These reflections all bear upon the fact that an overarching self-conscious identity akin to the contemporary label of Hinduism was a muted and slow-to-develop feature of the pre-modern period.[27] It is

[26] Rejecting also the ritualism of Brahmanism, *bhakti* was not (argues Fuchs 2018) reducible to the original elements of Indic axiality.

[27] McGovern 2018, however, implies that Brahmanism was implicated in identity boundary construction – indeed 'sectarianisation' – from the start. Hinduism originated first as an outsiders' term among Muslims and then Europeans. This does not undermine its etic utility nor the possibility of sentiments of commonality arising among historical Hindus themselves and finding expression

important to underline that certain features of transcendentalism – the potential for identity construction, the nexus of doctrinalism, truth-orientation, offensiveness – were therefore much more fully realised within traditions such as Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. From the mid-first millennium CE, indeed, Śaivism had detached itself from Brahmanism to become a quite new religious tradition with its own scriptures claiming to supersede the Vedas and offering a transcendence of the logic of caste.[28] In an etic perspective, we may still see this as recognisably part of a broader Hindu field; Śaivite thought and practice were clearly heavily related to Brahmanic tradition.[29] But in an emic sense, it became the most salient focus of identification for devotees, and Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites could engage in vigorous denunciations of each other.[30]

However, according to Andrew Nicholson, over the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, a broader emic understanding of what united all such groups did begin to develop, particularly in the works of doxographers.[31] In their hands, the categories of the *āstikas* (affirmers of the Veda, or the orthodox) and *nāstikas* (deniers of the Veda or the unorthodox) hardened into new forms. The *āstikas* encompassed distinct and contending schools to be sure, but these were now quite different from the *nāstikas* beyond the pale. For sixteenth-century philosopher Vijñānabhikṣu, the prototypical *nāstika* school was Buddhism, in tune with our understanding of it as offering a sharp break with Brahmanic norms.[32] It may be, however, that it was the encounter with Islam that drove the new sense of overarching religious commonality in contradistinction in the late medieval period. Certainly, there are some signs that Muslims were subject to an

through other concepts. See Sweetman 2003; Lorenzen 1999; Subrahmanyam 2017; Nicholson 2010.

[28] Sanderson 2006; Fisher 2017: 34–5.

[29] Brian K. Smith 1987: 40 defines 'Hinduism as the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimising reference to the authority of the Veda', which might not quite capture medieval Śaivism (Fisher 2017: 33–5; Sanderson 2006).

[30] For example, Horstmann 2011: 79.

[31] Nicholson 2010. In the eleventh century, Vaiṣṇavites, Buddhists and Muslims all employed an apocalyptic imagery predicting the future destruction of their religious enemies: Schmidt-Leukel 2017: ch. 12.

[32] Nicholson 2010: 192.

imagery of demonisation, while the concept of *nāstika* blurred into that of the 'barbarian' (*mleccha*).[33]

If these represented external spurs to certain intimations of unity, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Elaine Fisher argues, saw a profound internal reorganisation, witnessing 'the incorporation of Śaivite traditions under the umbrella of a new Vaidika orthodoxy, which, arguably, we may for the first time describe as Hinduism'. Śaivites were drawn again into the fold of Vedic authority, now coming to understand their movement as 'an orthodox exemplar – or, one might even say, a *sect* – of Brahminical Hinduism'.[34] Ironically, unification worked through sectarian difference. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism acquired greater popular and institutional presences in this period. They formed networks cutting across caste, region and language; they became communities addressed by scholars in public meeting halls or in pamphlets waging wars on their rivals. In short, offensiveness was well to the fore.[35] This situation is less paradoxical from a comparative perspective than it may seem. Although the points of contrast in other respects are legion, early modern Europe also saw Protestants and Catholics at once conscious of their status as Christians appealing to the same core texts and greatly animated by the implications of their deep disagreements over the commentarial traditions interpreting them and the nature of priestly ritual status. More apposite might be sixteenth-century Japan, in which one's status as a follower of Jōdo Shinshū or Nichiren Buddhism might be easily the most salient aspect of one's identity and social experience – but yet understood as a contestation over Buddhist truth.[36] In India, this is also, of course, the period in which Muslim imperial hegemony arrived in the shape of the Mughals, and Christianity arrived through the activities of the Portuguese. There were indeed very important waves of religious influence and sharing that flowed across all such divides – many of them meeting on the

[33] Nicholson 2010: 190–200; Lorenzen 1999; Pollock 1993. This does not contradict the fluid inter-penetration of Hindu and Islamic religiosities on the ground.

[34] Fisher 2017: 28. Also O'Hanlon and Washbrook 2011 on the rise of Benares as a centre of intellectual life.

[35] Fisher 2017: 11–13, 21–7.

[36] Thus, the constant mutual borrowing and contra-distinction-cum-one-upmanship among the Hindu schools is better assimilated to Prasenjit Duara's conception of 'dialogical transcendence'.

shared ground provided by transcendentalism![37] But by this time, then, there were also discourses of othering based on *both* orthodoxy and orthopraxy to call upon, and which might operate at *both* the higher level of something like Hinduism and the level of the competing sects within it.

Let us now begin to relate all this to the political sphere. From the above discussion, it is clear that the question of how far the Brahmanic worldview mattered for the functioning of society and polity in any one instance is therefore a matter of investigation for the historian rather than one of pre-determination. In broad terms, the trend in South Asian scholarship for the past generation or so has been to push against the essentially transcendentalist analyses of Hindu kingship presented by Louis Dumont and Jan Heesterman, in which the raja's sacred status was rendered inferior to that of the Brahmin.[38] Instead, some scholars have reached back to an earlier thinker, the anthropologist A. M. Hocart, who was engaged in a more universalist, comparative project to understand the centrality of the divine king to premodern society construction.[39] In fact, rather than pronouncing on either side of this debate, the various traditions of Indic kingship are better seen in terms of a dynamic tension between righteous and divinised elements, which will play out differently from case to case and over time. This was inevitably generative of paradox and encompassing manoeuvres of one-upmanship between rajas and Brahmins.[40] But this tension was also implicit in the ambiguous nature of Brahmanism itself.[41] Heesterman may equate the Brahmin with the

[37] Nair 2020 on philosophical dialogues in Mughal India.

[38] Note, however, that Heesterman (1998: 16–17) fully emphasised the raja's sacrality.

[39] On Hocart, Dirks 1987: 31, 121, 284; Ali 2004: 5. For how Brahmin priests, ascetics and kings might each subscribe to different understandings of hierarchy, see Burghart 1983.

[40] For example, Burghart 1987: 248.

[41] Shulman 1986: 407–8, 'The drive towards the radical vision of freedom and transcendence associated with the Renouncer effectively deprives the king, the acknowledged guardian of mundane order in its totality, of his authority, and vests it in the Brahman, but the subversive power of Brahmanical authority then divides the Brahmin from within, leaving him oscillating between the affirmation of the dharmic order with all of its inherent sacrificial violence, and the negation of that same order.' This results in 'a shifting, precarious, explosive relation between two unstable entities'. When Heesterman 1998: 16 describes kingship as 'even theoretically suspended between the sacral and the secular, divinity and mortal humanity, legitimate authority and arbitrary power, dharma and

renouncer, but in many contexts the Brahmin must be primarily defined by the immanentist functions of ritual officiation and the management of pollution and auspiciousness.[42] Indeed, as seen in the case of Ayutthaya (Chapter 5), Theravada courts enthusiastically patronised Brahmins for the entirely immanentist functions of performing efficacious court ritual and astrological calculation (in these cases the transcendentalist dimension was monopolised by the sangha).

Yet there is no reason to deny the relevance in many cases of the perspective of *dharmic* kingship in the Veda. In this vision, the king only achieves legitimacy through appropriate relations with Brahmins and the soteriological imperative they stand for. At times, this may even find expression in a classically transcendentalist deprecation of temporal authority.[43] Thus kings may be 'roundly abominated', equated to the slaughterhouse-keeper, for their necessary exercise of worldly violence.[44] The king's role is partially ethicised – the *rajadharma* – but at the expense of being potentially problematised.[45] In the teachings ascribed to Bhīṣma in the Mahābhārata we find the same paradox that Pali Buddhist writings on kingship wrestled with: that the truly righteous route to take would be to retire from the world, whereas doing one's duty as a king involves submitting to the 'yoke of worldly unrighteousness'.[46] According to the viewpoint of such texts, the moral autonomy of the Brahmin was unimpeachable, and in a certain sense ultimate authority was therefore his exclusive domain.[47] This is what lies behind Dumont's emphasis on the breach between status and power in India: It should be understood as a *relative* insight, which only makes sense against the backdrop of the *purely* divinised forms of kingship one finds in some immanentist societies.[48]

adharma', this may be understood as relating both to certain paradoxes of divinisation and to the tension between divinisation and righteousness.

[42] In an emphatically Hocartian reading, Quigley 2005 sees Brahmins as performing a king-centred task of pollution evacuation.

[43] Richards 1998: 3.

[44] Heesterman 1998: 14.

[45] Less insistently than in say Buddhist or Jain (Richards 1998: 5–6) traditions, thus allowing more straightforward revelling in heroic and amorous exploits.

[46] Heesterman 1998: 22. One way to resolve this is for the king himself to become a renouncer later in life.

[47] Heesterman 1998: 34. Shulman 2005: 393, 'Politics ... has definitely been ranked somewhere lower down the scale.'

[48] The argument of Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980) is therefore a comparative one, contrasting the Indic raja with the pharaohs of Egypt or the chiefs of Polynesia. See Parry 1998: 158–60; Galey 1989: 145.

At the same time, wherever they went, Brahmins helped establish the rites and discourses of divinisation, by which rajas became ritual devices for assuring the well-being and order of their realms, man-gods formed from portions of the high deities.[49] At least in terms of textual proscription, royal agency was thus contained within a ceremonial life that was 'unceasing, pervasive and dense and rich with meaning'.[50] Indeed, as laid out in an eighth-century Puranic Sanskrit text, which came to be used across the subcontinent as a manual for orchestrating royal accession, the ritual calendar oscillated between the two sub-types of divinisation: a more heroic form (also expressed, of course, on the battle-field) and a cosmic form (associated with the rainy season).[51] The emergence of puranic and tantric Hinduism created new avenues for royal divinisation, as did the rise of 'image sovereignty', in which the ruler's 'self' was identified with a venerated image in a royal temple complex.[52] Moreover, as Jos Gommans has suggested, the long reach of the arid zone into the subcontinent brought waves of mobile conquest elites carrying with them immanentist religious cultures, generating charisma in feats of arms and therefore opportunities for heroic divinisation. All this means, that in some instances, scholars may be justified in seeing the Brahmin's transcendent 'superiority' as barely visible or relevant.

The importance of keeping in view both transcendentalist and immanentist dimensions to Indic king-making – emerging in different combinations as the product of historical contingency – is evident in Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam's description of changing conceptions of sacred kingship in southern India.[53] Their central point concerns a striking innovation in the seventeenth century, whereby rajas of the Nayaka courts of Madurai and Tanjavur fashioned a newly explicit form of divinisation in which they did not merely share in Viṣṇu but

[49] Richards 1998: 2. Horstmann 2011: 77–8 affirms a cosmic form of divinised kingship for eighteenth-century Jaipur. Heesterman 1998: 15. *UP* 180; Pollock 2006: 278.

[50] Richards 1998: 3.

[51] Pleasingly (though with different terminological choices), Inden 1998 describes the ceremonial form of ritual sovereignty (i.e., the cosmic) as the 'transcendent', and the political, military dimension (i.e., the heroic) as 'immanent'. Meanwhile, Stein 1998's distinctions between 'heroic kingship', 'ritual kingship' and 'moral kingship' map rather well onto the concepts of heroic, cosmic and righteous forms.

[52] Gellner 2022; Moin 2015: 495–6, drawing on Davis 1997.

[53] Rao et al. 1993.

were baldly equated with him. This move entailed a distinct subordination of the Brahmin to the king.[54] This was part of a complex set of cultural developments by which the rajas moved to secure legitimacy under the new 'early modern' and *varna*-dissolving socio-economic conditions of the region.[55] Moreover, it must surely reflect the Śūdra origins of these dynasties – aligning with the point above about the way that Brahmanical hierarchicalism invites challenge. And yet the innovative quality to this manoeuvre only becomes clear when it is contrasted with a structure of the *longue durée* and the wider ecumene in which the king's position was dependent on his protection of 'righteous conduct', 'guided by the sastras (or laws) and the Brahmins who interpret them'.[56] Thus the empire-building ruler of Vijayanagara, Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509–1529), had cultivated a dialogue of mutual elevation with the Brahmins, whose position 'in a pan-Indian ideology of the *varna*-order' ensured that their support was a necessary dimension of creating trans-regional political projection.[57] This 'mutual ideological dependence [was] the structure on which the entire system sustain[ed] itself': a typical transcendentalist dialogue which the Nayakas subsequently collapsed into monologue. Note that the Nayaka shift towards a more untrammelled divinisation also entailed a diminished need to embody righteousness, allowing instead a glorification of the king's prowess in the domain of sensual enjoyment. If this is a particularly neat illustration of the dynamic flux between righteous and divinised forms of sacrality, in more general terms neither pole should be conflated with any one type of actor or tradition.[58]

[54] Aligning with the argument (*UP* 213) that more explicit assertions of ruler divinisation often accompanied subordination of priestly groups.

[55] Although Rao and Subrahmanyam 2012: 224–6 note one clue indicating closer identification in Krishnadevaraya's time and its presence in Southeast Asia and nineteenth-/twentieth-century Nepal.

[56] Rao and Subrahmanyam 2012: 220. Given the expressed uneasiness about subcontinental generalisation (211), it is striking how coherent, widespread and long-lasting this pattern is – and how far it conforms to typical characterisations of Hindu political theology. They also note that subsequent Hindu dynasties rather eschewed such 'transgressive' aspects and largely returned to *dharma*-oriented models.

[57] Rao and Subrahmanyam 2012: 221–3. This had its own innovatory qualities, of course.

[58] Brahmins might themselves be the agents of ruler divinisation, while counter-Brahmanical groups might present a more righteous vision and so on. There was evidently a great range of imageries and conceptions of rulership to draw on.

Confucianism

As with the case of northern India, some of the definitive features of Chinese 'axiality' were the result of a longer evolution over the first millennium BCE. Indeed, a foundational element was established very early, when the Zhou dynasty overran and succeeded the Shang in the eleventh century and claimed that their success reflected their superior virtue as recognised by the Mandate of Heaven. Heaven may have been propitiated through sacrificial rites, but these in themselves did not determine the fate of rulers, who were rather judged according to a moral standard.[59] Thus, an ethicised and contingent understanding of the sacrality of rule.[60]

But it is with the breaking apart of the Zhou order, first into the devolved powerholders of the Spring and Autumn period (or Chunqiu, 770–453 BCE) and then into the frenetic competition of the Warring States period (or Zhanguo, 453–221 BCE), that China takes its place in the Axial Age paradigm. Amongst its material dimensions were the arrival of iron technology, a demographic upswing and the development of mass infantry armies using new weapons and funded by centralised bureaucracies: a military-fiscal dynamic propelling experimentation and innovation amongst competing states. The ritual codes and social mores of an aristocratic order were forced to yield to more meritocratic principles, while political pluralism and intellectual pluralism developed hand-in-hand.[61] This context stimulated an exceptionally open philosophical field, in which the givenness of the status quo was undermined and diverse new visions of the good life and ultimate purpose became possible. When central order was established and greatly expanded under the Qin and then Han (206/202 BCE – 220 CE) dynasties, it led to a further wave of creativity – comparable to the way that many of the features of salvific transcendentalism coalesced into popular movements under Roman imperium in the West. In other words, the arrival of state power in a newly emphatic

[59] Pines 2002: 57–8. [60] Hsu 2005: 456; Puett 2017: 94; Duara 2015: 126.

[61] The essential context of China's Axial Age is described in Puett 2017 and 2022, and see too Pines 2017: 82–3; 2015: Bellah 2011: 406–9, 423–5. The different strands and schools of the Axial Age were loosely associated with different polities (Wang 2012: 350) that competed for the talents of statesmen and ministers.

form stimulated new attempts to advance, comprehend and defy it at the ideological level.[62]

It may be suggested that the central problematic of the Chinese Axial Age was a product of a certain vulnerability of Zhou ideology. This had generated an ethicised and transcendent *Tian* (Heaven) as a means of understanding and regulating politics – without connecting it to a salvific imperative or a continuing prophetic tradition. The result was that the judgements of Heaven could only be visible in the empirically observable world, and the more profoundly that world ceased to make sense, the more awkward became their interpretation. The fall, in 771 BCE, of the Western Zhou who supposedly had wielded the mandate was bad enough, but it was followed by an apparently endless state of ruthless competition in which the hand of an ethical overseer was hard to discern.

In the typical immanentist worldview, paradoxical and arbitrary outcomes to ritual activity did not necessarily present a logical problem. A teeming world of metapersons will generate negative as well as positive results for their human interlocutors as a product of the continuing flux of their social relations animated by their own largely amoral agency. But once the sphere of political authority had been presented as governed by a single moral power, its vicissitudes stimulated an intellectual crisis. By the mid-sixth century BCE, scepticism about the capacity of humanity to interpret Heaven was widespread amongst the literati.[63] The central development was that, as Yuri Pines puts it, 'Heaven was transformed from a purposeful deity interacting with humans into impersonal law.'[64] As such, it became functionally otiose. It may or may not be intervening in human affairs, but since speculations to that effect did not help one make political decisions, they were largely left to one side.

Beyond the essentially political cult of Heaven, there was also a world of spirits and deities, which functioned in broadly immanentist fashion. Indeed, it must be underlined how profoundly immanentism characterised Chinese religiosity in general.[65] But certain qualities of

[62] Puett 2017: 99.
[63] Pines 2002: 66, and the Mandate of Heaven hence lost relevance: Luo and Pines 2023.
[64] Pines 2002: 62; Luo and Pines 2023 on the plurality of understandings of Heaven that resulted.
[65] Poo 1998.

this immanentism also came under severe strain amongst the educated elite.[66] Over this period, the transactional do ut des model of sacrificial exchange was increasingly felt to be intellectually unsatisfactory, even as it remained fundamental to popular religious practice. Instead, relations with metapersons were also ethicised – no doubt connected to the equivalent re-conceptualisation of Heaven.[67] For rulers, this meant that spirits and deities were held to be attentive to the flourishing of their subjects rather than attempts to engage them through sacrifice. This process chimed with the need to control and stabilise the religious field, too, for the way that unadulterated immanentism allows the proliferation of new rites to 'unruly deities' was seen as a threat to the status quo.[68] For relations to deities as with relations to Heaven, a multitude of different intellectual attitudes was now possible and expressible.[69]

The central problematic of the Chinese Axial Age was much less germane to the Abrahamic and Indic traditions where the imperative of other-worldly salvation suppressed the relevance of this-worldly well-being. A supreme, ethicised principle could deliver justice through a soteriological mechanism instead, as articulated by prophets and teachers. But in Western Zhou and Chunqiu China, 'No prophet spoke on behalf of Heaven, no priests explained its will, there was not even a sacred book to explicate Heaven's demands of the people.'[70]

Except, a few 'prophets' did then arise, first with Mozi (ca. 460–390 BCE). In contrast with Abrahamic theist movements, however, Mozi was not a prophet per se; his doctrine derived from historical deduction rather than direct divine revelation.[71] His followers, the Mohists, took the principle of ethicised relations with deities to a logical conclusion:

> Heaven was a purely good deity who ruled over a pantheon of ghosts who in turn always acted to reward the good and punish the bad. Since the cosmos was flawlessly moral, humans were called upon to create an equally moral realm on earth as well.[72]

[66] Hsu 1999: 584. [67] Pines 2002: 71.
[68] Pines 2002: 73–4. Compare *UP* 122–35.
[69] Including agnostic statements about their very existence. Pines 2002: 68.
[70] Pines 2002: 61.
[71] Pines 2024: 60. Pines (personal communication) therefore suggests that Heaven may have been more of an intellectual construct for Mozi than an object of faith, with only rare instances of it as 'a sentient and interventionist deity'.
[72] Puett 2017: 98. Roetz 2012: 250–3 on Mohist thought as response to relativism.

This was a Heaven that loved its people, had organised the cosmos on their behalf and laid down guidelines for them to follow, precluding the need for lavish ritual sacrifices to manipulate the spirit world or mourn the dead.[73] It necessitated a doctrine of *jian ai* (universal love), while ritual (*li*) was spurned.[74] The ruler was here subordinated to a higher principle: 'The Son of Heaven cannot rectify himself; he is rectified by Heaven.'[75] Indeed earthly hierarchy would be a meritocracy established by the dictates of Heaven.[76]

Mozi was a product of the Warring States period, in which nearly everything was up for debate, especially the nature of Heaven and the proper constitution of political authority. Such preoccupied two of the most foundational thinkers for Confucianism, Mengzi (or 'Mencius' ca. 380–304 BCE) and Xunzi (ca 310–230 BCE). Xunzi was strikingly sceptical about much of the business of metapersons, as we shall see below. He argued that a single ruler arose simply out of the need to unify collectivities – a rationalist–humanist perspective that bears resemblance to both the Buddhist narrative of the 'Great Elect' (*Mahāsammata*) in the *Aggañña Sutta* and Thomas Hobbes' reasoning about the Leviathan.[77] Many thinkers, and most notably Xunzi, were able to measure up the fallible occupants of monarchical office against an ideal standard of the True Monarch, as embodied in the legendary sage kings of ancient times.[78] This chapter cannot discuss Daoism in any depth, but elements of the key Daoist texts, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, emerged around the middle of the fourth century BCE. These would constitute a major influence on the Huang-Lao tradition in which Heaven was envisaged as an essentially impersonal, natural order.[79] Meanwhile the *Fajia* or Legalist theorists of state – rationalist, anti-aristocratic, instrumentalist and somewhat amoral – simply ignored the world of Heaven or deities in their deliberations. And, in the fourth century BCE, there are also developed self-divinisation movements: 'Instead of trying to influence spirits through divination and sacrifice, humans were called on to undertake self-

[73] Puett 2015a: 237–8. [74] Bellah 2011: 432–4. [75] Pines 2017; 89–90.
[76] Puett 2017: 238.
[77] Pines 2017: 83; Shelach-Lavi and Pines 2005 for explicit parallels between Ancient Chinese and more modern European political thought.
[78] Pines 2013: 260–3.
[79] Luo and Pines 2023: 35–7. The Huang-Lao tradition would predominate in the reigns of the first Han emperors.

cultivation practices that would allow them to become spirits directly.'[80] Note, in passing, how profoundly and diversely immanentist predicates had come under strain in this milieu.

This last 'theomorphic' strand was heavily deployed by the first ruler to bring the fragmented warring world together under a single sceptre, the First Emperor, Qin (r. 221–210 BCE). He thus engendered a new possibility: the outright divinisation of the ruler in the heroic mode. The First Emperor stands as an equivalent to Alexander the Great, arriving at the end of the Axial Age to generate a new pattern of legitimate political authority through sheer military–political accomplishment. His case is equally as definitive as Alexander's of the dynamic by which unusually explicit claims of divinisation tend to occur in the historical record. The charisma and megalomania generated by extravagant success allowed rulers to assert their dominance over the religious domain by placing themselves at its apex – without undergoing undue ceremonial curbs on their executive agency. In the case of the First Emperor, he had achieved the unthinkable by conquering, unifying and pacifying All-Under Heaven. Indeed, by achieving this utopic outcome, he could claim to be a messianic incarnation of the long-awaited 'True Monarch'.[81] Any sense of subordination to a higher ethical principle such as the Mandate of Heaven was cast off. As a *huangdi* or 'August Thearch', he would not die but ascend to assimilation with the 'Great One' who resided above Heaven itself and with full mastery over the teeming ranks of lesser metapersons.[82] In the Warring States period, ministers operating within incipient bureaucratic systems sought to limit the agency of the sovereign by emphasising his dependence on the wise counsel of his ministers. But as a true sage himself, the First Emperor naturally surpassed the meritocratic claims of his ministers, and this conflict with the literati even resulted in the burning of books in private collections.[83] This vision of unparalleled state power concentrated in the exaltation of one man is evident in the vast terracotta army in attendance at his mausoleum in Xi'an. As for the ideology of governance, this was now dominated by Legalism, which emphasised the inherent waywardness of human nature and the need to control it through coercion rather than

[80] Puett 2022: 145; 2002. [81] Pines 2013. [82] Puett 2017: 99; 2015: 240–1.
[83] Pines 2017: 94–5: 'The ruler was not a disciple but a teacher of the intellectuals' (compare with the Platonic Philosopher-King). As such the literati's duty to remonstrate remained intact but had to be much more cautiously practised.

cultivation. This vision, which simply bracketed out much of the ethicisation of the political sphere developed in different ways in the Axial Age, profoundly failed to attract legitimacy. No doubt, the empirical vulnerability of supernatural utopianism was also at work (it is hard to sustain belief in the end of history, after all) amidst the usual play of more material factors.[84] In under a decade, the Qin dynasty was toppled by a popular uprising of unprecedented scope and ferocity.

The great intellectual ferment of the Warring States period did not, of course, coagulate into a single civilisational pattern. But by the close of this period there had emerged three strands that Michael Puett has identified for their longue durée significance.[85] They are also highlighted here for how clearly they speak to the concerns of this book. First, there developed a form of transcendentalism that bears a much stronger comparison with Abrahamic and Indic forms than has often been recognised, as expressed first by the Mohists. Second, there was a form of divinised kingship which sought to instate the ruler as the supreme master of both religious and political spheres, as initiated by the First Emperor. Third, and most influentially, there was the Confucian tradition, which preserved the centrality of ritual to the ruler's relations with Heaven and to social order per se through an ethicised re-conceptualisation of it. These ways of thinking became foundational reference points for all subsequent intellectual and political projects in pre-modern East Asian history.

For example, to jump forward in time for a moment, many of the principles established by the Mohists would find popular expression among the Daoist and millenarian movements that emerged much later as the Han regime began to give way in the second century CE. (Indeed, they also represent a democratisation and ethicisation of the project of self-divinisation.)[86] Just like Buddhists and Christians, Daoist groups venerated the historic and singular vision of an individual – in their case, Laozi, who was held to have lived in the sixth century BCE. In 142 CE, Zhang Daoling received revelations from Laozi that purported to rectify misinterpretations of his teachings. Around these revelations, an autonomous community known as the Celestial Masters formed in the southwest in the wake of the disintegration of Han authority. For them Laozi was no other than the Way

[84] On more material factors: Korolkov 2021. [85] Puett 2017: 240.
[86] Puett 2002: 314.

himself – in effect, a moral creator god.[87] His teachings, set down in scripture, brought a message of eternal truth as a counter ideology.[88] They scorned ritual attempts to manipulate the ghosts of popular religious practice, instead privileging self-cultivation, sincere belief and meritocratic communal transformation. They told a story of good versus evil that placed worldly vicissitudes within a much larger narrative. Just as with other transcendentalisms, this stimulated apocalyptic hopes and fears. Millenarianism was more explicitly expressed in the Taiping (Great Peace) movement, founded on similar principles, which gave rise to the Yellow Turban revolt in 184 CE.[89] Thus: a deep ethicisation of religious action and cosmology; an offensive, textualised, canonised revelation; a soteriology based on the gap between an ideal order and a corrupt worldly one; and a repudiation of immanentist desiderata and ritual mechanisms. But this legacy persisted essentially as a counter-cultural ideology, exploited precisely by those who wished to turn the world upside down.

As for the second form, the assertion of divinised status was preserved in the title of 'August Thearch', which would be adopted by subsequent emperors. The exceptionally long reign of the fifth emperor of the Han dynasty, Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE), stands out for the explicit development of the First Emperor's project in certain ways – and, not coincidentally, for its feats of territorial expansion and political consolidation. He too toured his regions, making sacrifices to local powers and drawing on the skills of *fangshi* (magicians) in order to secure his own apotheosis. He too appealed to the Great One, a deity higher than Heaven or the entire world of metapersons.[90]

But Emperor Wu also sought to disassociate himself from the failed Qin project in several ways.[91] And indeed his reign is often associated with the ascension of the third of our three strands and by far the most influential paradigm for state religion thereafter, Confucianism. This sought authority in the texts associated with Confucius and his disciples written during the Warring States period, but which had been framed as a resurrection of the political theology of the Western Zhou.

[87] Puett 2022. [88] Compare *UP* 62 on 'offensiveness'.
[89] Puett 2015a: 250–5. On the complex relationship between second- century-CE mass movements and 'Daoism': Espesset 2009.
[90] Puett 2002: ch. 8; 2015a: 240–1.
[91] He did not claim to be a sage, even if his advisors flattered him as such. Pines 2013: 277.

It is under Emperor Wu that the Five Classics were canonised, to be supervised through appointment of court academicians and to become the basis for an examination system to select officials.[92] This was the result of advice from the minister Dong Zhongshu (195–115 BCE).[93] Although not all of Dong's philosophy was heeded in his lifetime, and remained a source of debate, his vision of what the proper appreciation of Confucius's teachings entailed was crucial for the understanding of the emperorship that was established by the end of the first millennium BCE. This amounted, in effect, to the crystallisation of a cosmic–ethicised conception of kingship that would endure for the next two thousand years.

Dong drew together various traditions from the Warring States period to render Heaven as the prime focus of attention, as a being who could bestow and withdraw the mandate but functioned in the manner of a cosmic law.[94] The purpose of ritual was not that of transaction with wilful metapersons; rather, the cultivation of the Five Constants (humaneness, propriety, ritual, knowledge and sincerity) would align humanity with Heaven and bring its benefaction. This was above all, the duty of the emperor: 'The ruler's rectification of himself inaugurates the ordering and harmonising of his court, the people, and ultimately the natural world.'[95] In the hands of Dong and his later disciples, the sacrality of the imperial office was therefore enhanced; at the same time, it was understood that the occupant of the office belonged to the human realm. Moreover, it was only on the advice of his ministers, who could interpret the omens of the Heavens and were in turn guided by the Spring and Autumn Annals (ascribed to Confucius), that the ruler could achieve this function.[96]

This enduring synthesis accommodated transcendentalist and immanentist tendencies in a way that is quite unparalleled in other Axial regions. A certain scepticism about the immanentist logic of ritual that we find animating all other Axial regions was also internalised – and yet as part of a claimed reconstruction of the Bronze Age sacrificial system. In a sense, ritual had been 'unmasked', revealing its true function.[97] In its most explicit form, as in the work of Xunzi, this was a sociological insight, a Durkheimian comprehension of ritual as

[92] Pines 2015; Hardy and Kinney 2017: 47–9.
[93] Some scholars prefer 179–104 BCE. [94] Puett 2002: 290–300, Pines 2024.
[95] Puett 2002: 295. [96] Puett 2002: 298. [97] Puett 2022.

society-maker, order-creator, polity-preserver par excellence. Yes, for most thinkers, the world of metapersons remained fully intact. But the central purpose of ritual (*li*) was not so much to engage that world as to remake the dispositions of human subjects as the building blocks of a harmonious society – one that achieved order without recourse to sheer coercion.[98] From a certain angle of vision, this focus on ritual as a mechanism for cultivating 'humaneness' (*ren*) represents a distinctive version of the shift to interiorisation that we see in other transcendentalisms.[99] Hence the use of the conditional in some texts: the injunction to conduct ritual 'as if' the spirits were present.[100] The potential for a disenchanted vision of ritual was never lost, and it would allow Confucian scholars to attack the supernatural elements of Buddhism and Christianity![101]

But, for the most part, ritual participants did consider that spirits and deities would also be domesticated by their participation – they were then subject to a civilising process in a manner analogous to Buddhism. The system fashioned under the Han ritualists would bring humans and ancestors and other metapersons into productive alignment.[102] In this sense, the claim to return to the Western Zhou system contained an important truth; there is indeed a sense in which the Bronze age pattern of (ethicised) cosmic kingship was resurrected here in a form that would endure until the twentieth century. Sacrificial ritual as gift exchange remained central to the performance of rulership as it did for the whole of the social hierarchy.[103]

[98] Roetz 2020: 18 cites Xunzi: 'What does it mean if it rains after a rain ritual has been performed? I say, it means nothing . . . these things are not done in hope of achieving the desired result, but for the sake of culture (wen 文) . . . To regard them as culture is auspicious, to regard them as something divine leads to calamity.' Also Bellah 2011: 214.

[99] The process of transcendentalisation is disclosed by shifts in the meanings of key words from more aristocratic and immanentist meanings to ethical ones. Hence: *ren*, perhaps manly to humane; *de*: charisma to virtue; *li:* ritual to ceremony/civility.

[100] Puett 2015b; Roetz 2020: 21; Paramore 2017: 21.

[101] McMullen 1987: 188 on Tang literati scepticism; Laamann 2015: 93 on the Qing period; Paramore 2017: 21 on an East Asian 'relativisation of ritual practice which invited interpretation in instrumentalist, agnostic, pluralist, reflexive and reflective terms'. Gernet 1985; Rule 2001: 68.

[102] Puett 2022: 146–7.

[103] Wilson 2002. Perhaps ironically, Confucius himself became the subject of deeply immanentist sacrificial worship.

By the end of the first millennium BCE, then, Confucian literati had swung the tiller hard against overt divinisation, rendering the emperor the 'Son of Heaven' and ruling under Heaven's Mandate. In this way, rulership was both elevated and constrained in two modes simultaneously. Heroic aggrandisement was curtailed by a distinct shift to the cosmic form, in which it was not the ruler's inherent divinity that was important but his mediation between Heaven and Earth, ancestors and people.[104] It was ritual performance that rendered him contiguous to the divine.[105] But in a manner that was rather equivalent to righteous kingship, moral self-cultivation was held to be vital to his legitimacy. Doctrine dictated what this meant, defining the role according to textual precepts and due regard for the law.[106] One might say that the practice of ritual-ethics would subdue the arbitrariness of the character of the emperor just as it would for the characters of deities and subjects.

As with other East Asian and Indic ideologies, in immanentist fashion, natural disasters, freakish weather or military setbacks could be directly related to the quality of the ruler's relations with the divine; in transcendentalist fashion these could be blamed on ethical as well as ceremonial infelicity.[107] Yet, the absence of a salvific logic in the Confucian case meant that this world was the only dimension in which the judgement of Heaven could be discerned, and the result was a highly empirical sensibility in which the fortunes of the ruler were anxiously read into the movements of the stars, the appearances of dragons or the well-being of the people. This was the only vehicle for something like revelation.

We have now arrived at the reason why it is so difficult to place the Confucian tradition in terms of transcendentalism, why Benjamin Schwarz, for example, resorted to the somewhat paradoxical term of 'this-worldly' transcendence to describe it.[108] As Prasenjit Duara

[104] Puett 2015a: 241–2.

[105] *UP* 174, the term 'divinisation' is a bit awkward for the cosmic subtype insofar as it emphasises the intercessory role of the ruler as opposed to the nature of their being. Note, the emperor's subjects were banned from engaging Heaven in ritual communication: Duara 2015: 164.

[106] Puett 2022: 143 on doctrinal kingship, and note Pines 2017: 87–8.

[107] As mentioned in *UP* 205 this was a common feature across Indic and Sinic worlds. Tang period: McMullen 1987: 215. Compare Leeuwen 2017: 44–6, 71, 93–8.

[108] Schwartz 1975. Wang 2012: 366 refers to 'immanent transcendence'; Elvin 1986 was agnostic verging on sceptical. Duara 2015: 131 refers to Metzger 1977 on Confucianism's 'elusive immanence', while Dolce 2012: 134 suggests that 'the anthropocosmic worldview of Confucianism does not fit easily into

observed, the drive towards moral aspiration implies that 'the possibility of the unity of man and Heaven was always elusive.'[109] Fundamentally, the literati could appeal to the will of a Heaven and the imperative of the Way (*Dao*) from which the earthly realm had become divorced.[110] But, even if we choose to characterise this as an ontological breach of sorts, its relevance was limited in certain ways.[111] Heaven was not an entity that called for the disavowal of earthly reality in favour of the individual's assimilation to its own ineffable reality. If Confucianism exhibits as intense a focus on ethics and truth as the Indic and monotheistic traditions, the third and most distinctive element of the triad of transcendentalism – salvation or liberation – is missing.[112] The result was a kind of de facto monism in which the political realm remained the locus of idealisation.[113] In the hands of Mengzi, as Mark Elvin puts it:

> *Tian*, although it is the source of moral awareness, and capable of having wishes and directing events 'does not speak' and reveals itself exclusively through these events, often coming close to meaning little more than 'fate', 'providence', or 'nature.' In most contexts the term cannot any longer be translated as 'God' or 'heaven' because it so clearly a power immanent in the world and not external to it.[114]

In one sense, *Tian* therefore became a *more* transcendent principle than the personified deity imagined by the monotheistic traditions, insofar as it remained relatively distant from the anthropomorphic urge, its

Western theological categories such as immanence and transcendence'. See Puett 2002:11–20 on the historiography, and Roetz 2020 for an eloquent argument as to how far pure immanence had been left behind.

[109] Duara 2015: 131. For Benjamin Schwartz (1989: 53), there was 'a clear apprehension of the gap between the human order as it ought to be and as it actually is'.

[110] Bellah 2011: 419–20, 476–7 makes the case for a transcendentalist quality per se.

[111] Eisenstadt 2003: 286: 'What was characteristic of China was not the lack of such transcendental vision or tension, but rather a "secular" definition of this tension and a this-worldly mode for its resolution' which meant that it had 'relatively limited institutional effects'; compare Roetz 2020: 14 on a structural rather than ontological breach.

[112] McMullen 1987: 186 described Confucianism as 'archaic', having 'no developed sense of the transcendent; it focussed on this life rather than life after death'.

[113] Pines 2015: 1.

[114] Elvin 1986: 342. Compare Pines 2017: 89–90.

perfection un-sullied by human-like motives and passions.[115] This was a point to which anti-Christian polemics would return in the seventeenth century, ridiculing the non-rationalised Jehovah lurking behind the philosophical rhetoric of Jesuit interlocuters.[116] In another sense, as Elvin notes, *Tian* remained more deeply immanent insofar as it operated entirely in the phenomena of the observable world.

Indeed, in an intriguing way, the lack of a transcendent salvific end state or a revelatory tradition generated an even more single-minded preoccupation with discerning the nature and possibilities of ethical perfection. The self-cultivation to which the Confucian gentleman aspired was not therefore a matter of distancing oneself from the affairs of this world till even the actions of a king took on ant-like insignificance; rather the affairs of kings and counsellors were imbued with particular numinosity.[117] Hence the intense parallelism between earthly and heavenly bureaucracies, so redolent of other immanentist imaginaires, could proceed untroubled. Yet the 'this-worldly tension' that Eisenstadt and Roetz have remarked on was real: It meant that the literati were not merely state functionaries but bear analogy with the clerisies of Buddhist, Christian and Muslim societies in their capacity to call rulership to account and to subordinate it to ethical imperatives.[118] Like these other clerisies, they possessed a degree of intellectual–moral autonomy, appealed to a universal code of ethics based on the golden rule (mitigated by filial piety) and established their status through their duty to guard and interpret a foundational textual tradition.[119] They did not form a separate institution that might act as a counter-weight to the state in the manner of a Christian church or even a sangha. But, more successfully than any other product of the Axial Age, Confucianism crystallised a form of masculine elite social status that could eventually be held up as a model for the governing

[115] Sixteenth-century Japanese visions of the Way of Heaven (*Tentō*) were more blurred: see Chapter 4.

[116] In Xu Dashou's *Zuopi* (1610s), the emotional and self-interested qualities of the Christian deity are ridiculed (Meynard 2017). Compare the criticisms of the Japanese writer Fabian Fukansai: Hibbard and Hiraishi 1963: 11. Gernet 1985.

[117] Hsu 2005: 458: 'From the days of Confucius, the Axial Age breakthrough in Chinese culture was an affirmation of the centrality of human beings.'

[118] Hsu 2005: 460; Eisenstadt 1996: 221. For Mencius and Xunxi, the contentment of the people could be a sign of Heaven's approbation: an elite-interpreted notion of popular arbitration, Bellah 2011: 46–74.

[119] Golden rule: see Bellah 2012: 418 citing *Analects* 15:24.

class as a whole – the scholar-gentleman – that was not defined by military values or linked fundamentally to military attainment.

For these reasons, it is tempting, if awkward, to describe Confucianism as quasi-transcendentalist. Indeed, this sense that Confucianism was in some ways profoundly analogous to Buddhism while lacking the soteriological–metaphysical notion of transcendence is visible in some Buddhist critiques of it – just as Confucian critiques might focus on the subversive anti-social qualities of Buddhism.[120] In due course, Confucianism responded to the challenge of Buddhism by developing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries a more metaphysical dimension in the shape of Neo-Confucianism.[121] This amplified the Confucian emphasis on the individual and internal cultivation of virtue, and posited an Ultimate, 'above all limits of space, form and time'.[122] Determining the extent to which this constituted an ontological breach is, again, no simple matter. Indeed, in the later twentieth century, a number of Chinese philosophers working in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 'Modern Confucian' tradition explicitly drew upon Jaspers to develop an account of Confucianism as 'immanent transcendence'.[123]

If Zhou ethicisation was a matter of rulership, Confucianism extended this – in theory – to everyone.[124] But Neo-Confucianism opened up new intellectual and practical avenues by which this could become a realisable goal. By the Ming period (1368–1644), Neo-Confucianism was enshrined as state orthodoxy, but its location of ultimate moral autonomy in the individual opened up a greater normative distance between the literati and the state, in the reading of Peter Bol. Not a single emperor or dynasty, it could be argued, had attained the status of the sages.[125] This moved closer to the ruler–clerisy tensions we find in transcendentalist traditions, and even found institutional expression in independent networks of academies,

[120] For the former, see Paramore 2016a: 28.
[121] Hsu 2005: 460–1.
[122] Duara 2015: 131. Wang Yangming's (1472–1529) school then saw the Ultimate as realised in the Self – which echoes *ātman/brahman* thought in Hinduism.
[123] Rošker 2014. Note that certain interpretations of Buddhism can also place the highest spiritual goal within the true reality of the human being, while many transcendentalisms have yielded paradoxical forms of philosophical monism.
[124] Thanks to Ross Moncrieff.
[125] Bol 2008: 129–30.

voluntary organisations and shrines.[126] Perhaps the most visible example of this tension would be the fate of the so-called Donglin academy, which sought to reform government through 'an ethically intense and militant Confucianism' but was bloodily purged in the 1620s.[127] One might then, at a push, refer to Neo-Confucianism as a reform movement. It sought to return to original truths and assert the moral primacy of those truths against the seductions of other interests and also served to 'laicise' or popularise its teachings, extending its sensibility of self-regulation across ever broader swathes of the population. Yet, profound differences with truly salvific traditions remained.

[126] See De Bary, ed. 1970 on late Ming individualism, particularly in Wang Yangming. He concludes (223) that Confucianism was able to fulfil the same function as that served by medieval Christianity according to Butterfield (1961: 39): 'If religion produced the authoritarian system, it also produced the rebellion against the system, as though the internal aspect of the faith were at war with the external.'

[127] Dardess 2002: 1; Bol 2008: 265.

10 *Explaining Global Patterns of Ruler Conversion*

A Brief Summary of the Case Studies

Of the major case studies in this book, relatively modest missionary exertions produced spectacular ruler conversions in late-fifteenth-century Kongo and early-nineteenth-century Hawaii. In sixteenth-century Japan, there were some striking successes among the warlords of Kyushu, but most of their peers did not convert, while Christianity was then increasingly persecuted by the authorities who brought the islands under central command. And in Ayutthaya in the 1680s, even the suggestion that the throne might be held by a Christian provoked a coup that brought the populace onto the streets. Such were the divergent ways in which the prospect of ruler conversion interlocked with the operations of political legitimacy and authority. Let us summarise how these outcomes may be understood in terms of the three modes of ruler conversion, leaving to one side the myriad other dimensions that were discussed in the chapters.

In every one of these cases, the first mode, religious diplomacy, was the means by which conversion dilemmas arrived at the table of high chiefs, warlords and monarchs. Naturally so, for Christianity was borne on the currents of European imperial and commercial endeavour. It was the hard facts of the internal and external balance of power that induced local rulers to tolerate missionary designs on their souls. It was in Siam and even more in Japan, that this mode was the most important. As symbolised by the extravagant theatre of the royal embassies in Versailles and Ayutthaya, it was only the web of diplomacy spun by Narai, and especially Phaulkon, which raised the spectre of a Christian monarchy. In the Darwinian environment of *sengoku* Japan, military desperation among some of the lesser daimyo converts and commercial–fiscal considerations among all were surely the most important factors. In Kongo and Hawaii, without denying for a moment the new material forces that shaped their encounter, the lures

of religious diplomacy were less vital. It would certainly be quite wrong to import a generic paradigm of colonialism here and consider their religious transformations a mere capitulation to outside force. Rather, ruler conversions here – even at both ends of our temporal spectrum (1480s and 1820s) – express local logics and local agency above all.

In every case where conversion occurred, the revelation or rhetoric of immanent power was, however, the crucial step in turning attraction into baptism. But the force of this dynamic was most powerful in Kongo and Hawaii, where the religious systems were entirely predicated on such immanentist concerns and where foreign Christian groups arrived in association with certain features indicating productive relations with the divine, from firearms to relative immunity to disease. In Kongo, Christianity arrived as a form of war magic and interacted with a set of understandings around the realm of the ancestors and initiation cults in order to produce the initial baptism of Nzinga a Nkuwu; it was subsequently crucial to the battle of 1506 that allowed and defined the ascension of Afonso. Because of the way that the Hawaiian case uniquely separates out the collapse of the old state cult from the matter of conversion, it brings out particularly clearly the circumstances in which the empiricist qualities of immanentism lend it a certain vulnerability. Victories in battle mediated the moments of both collapse and conversion, although the hopes and fears around bodily healing were arguably more consequential over the longer term. We also see how immanentist ritual experts may be no less convinced by such concerns than any others and therefore facilitate rather than obstruct elite conversion. In both Kongo and Hawaii, the military defeat of anti-Christian pushbacks fed directly into the legitimisation of the new order, and iconoclasms of pagan objects swiftly followed – the meaning of which was shaped by local immanentist premises.

Perhaps surprisingly, immanent power was also the principal arena of struggle between Christianity and the existing systems in Japan – for all that scholars have been drawn to the other matters from the philosophical to the political. Claims about the potency of the divine forces on both sides were part of a bitter and emotional conflict. In the initial breakthrough period, those warlords who decided to risk conversion were finally drawn into it by the prospect of divine assistance in both martial and medical terms. But across Japan more generally, there is no sense that Christian interpretations of the play of fortune held any

real advantage, while a set of transcendentalist discourses provided the means for defusing some of the power of this dynamic. The same point registers particularly clearly in the intellectual mobilisation of the sangha against Christianity in Siam. Here, too, there was an attempted healing miracle very early on (1667), and French ambassadors later dwelt incessantly – apparently speaking to a 'pagan' logic – upon the glorious immanent power of their god. Both endeavours fell resoundingly flat.

The third element of the model, remaking authority, again played a role in all cases, but it was above all significant in Kongo and Hawaii. In both instances, primary state formation was already underway, and the prospect of stabilising and centralising royal authority is clearly expressed in subsequent manoeuvres. Given the deficiency and European provenance of our sources, we may only essay this hesitantly for Kongo, but there are enough signs that Afonso was attempting a more general reformation of life. In Hawaii, swiftly borne into the currents of a much more modern conjuncture, both the survival imperative and the opportunities espied by the Ka'ahumanu faction indicated the need for a new dispensation. This included a means of construing rulership fit for the conditions of pacification, the exercise of female sovereignty and the conduct of foreign trade. Again, as across the Pacific, remaking the earthly realm could not be distinguished from remaking relations with the unearthly powers that be. In Japan, too, monotheism may have brought a language of obedience that appealed to some in the age of internecine war. But the social power at its disposal in fact rendered the faith all the more threatening to lords intent on reunifying the country – and thereby ensured its persecution. Moreover, there were, in this land of ancient waves of state formation and many layers of transcendentalist and philosophical traditions, a variety of ideological options open to its new ruling class. In Siam, meanwhile, any missionary arguments in this area were simply laughable, and not only because it was unified rather than riven – for succession disputes may bring conflict and a potential opening for new ideological visions into even the most stable regime. But the royal office in Ayutthaya was sacralised well beyond anything seen in Europe, and the powers of its incumbent were (in some ways) also relatively untrammelled: Missionary attempts to argue that Christianity brought any advantages in this arena were unlikely to find purchase.

Above all, the prospect of ruler conversions raised serious problems of legitimacy in the cases of Japan and Siam, where political authority had long been associated with transcendentalist traditions. This applies somewhat less to the cases of the warlords of Japan, largely because of several consequences of the long civil war. Operating in a situation in which the nature of political authority itself had been thrown into flux, in which the most sacral form of kingship was embodied by a politically defunct emperor and in which the transcendentalist tension between clerisy and rulership had broken out into outright opposition, the daimyo were intent on quite radical innovations pushed down on their subjects from on high. But there is no doubt that the varied and piecemeal deployment of ideology by rulers forging the reunification of Japan involved finding Christianity wanting according to existing soteriological and ethical norms. Equally, there is no doubt that the sangha mobilised on many levels against the Christian threat and proved a huge obstacle to missionary ambitions. What limited its obstructiveness in Japan was the institutional and doctrinal disunity of Buddhism there, and its shared ground with Confucianism and Shintō. In Theravada Ayutthaya, on the other hand, the unified sangha, having famously appeared gentle, suddenly revealed a flash of ferocity, mobilising its soteriological and moral authority to provide a genuinely popular element to the events of 1688, which saw the French and Christian threat permanently crushed. In both Japan and Thailand, the experience of aggressive monotheism acted as an inoculation, a taste of a threat that stimulated the more 'offensive' qualities of Buddhism – typically so different to those exhibited by monotheism but now rather more analogous – to come to the fore. Christianity became enduringly associated with notions not just of foreign threat but of amoral immanent (demonic) power. Thus, with regard to the second and third stages of the model, there were distinctively transcendentalist elements of the existing religion – with ideological, institutional and societal implications – that provided serious limits on the capacity of rulers to convert to Christianity and establish it as the enduring and hegemonic religion of state.

Explaining Broad Patterns

How far do these conclusions allow us to explain patterns of ruler conversion on a global scale? Were the prospects of a royal turn to

monotheism weakened in regions where other transcendentalist traditions had already become dominant?[1] This chapter explores dimensions to a provisional answer to this question, indicating avenues along which specialist attention would need to proceed. From time to time, the discussion moves beyond ruler conversions to reflect on more general patterns of the adoption of monotheism. It is important to appreciate that there are some elements of causation common to both phenomena and other ways in which they are vitally distinct.

As the above discussion made clear, at no point has this book advanced a form of cultural determinism, instead invoking a great range of considerations in explaining each successive case study. It will be the interdependency of variables that is revealed by the comparative method rather than any independent lines of causation. This makes it all the more remarkable, perhaps, that it is indeed possible to discern the shapes cast by pre-existing religious traditions in helping organise the geography of ruler conversion.

A First Look at the World

Amidst various accumulated scholarly anxieties about how to conceive of the explanatory capacity of cultural and religious boundaries, let us start by clearing the mental palette with a simple question, deploying the apparently crude category of 'Islam': How many Muslim rulers in situ have converted to Christianity? The mind is not immediately besieged by examples. Instead, even for regions where one might expect the play of religious diplomacy to be rather intense, the evidence only seems to accentuate the way in which political legitimacy was predicated on maintaining an Islamic religious allegiance. The Mediterranean region, for example, naturally saw shifting alliances between Muslim and Christian powers.[2] Thus, in 1535, the Hafsid caliph of Tunis, Muley al-Hassan, drew on the help of Charles V to eject the Ottoman corsair Khair ad-Din (or Barbarossa) from his realm and subsequently became a vassal of the Habsburg emperor. But, when he travelled to Italy in 1543, his son Amida rebelled and spread the rumour that al-Hassan had become Christian and thereby usurped the

[1] This question was first aired in Strathern 2007b.

[2] The conversion of the last Almohad governor of Valencia, Abū Zayd, happened only once he was in exile and had become a vassal of Iberian kings; it was kept secret for twenty-eight years until 1264: Fancy 2013.

throne – neither the first nor last time that the claim of apostasy was used as potent propaganda to raise up rebellion amongst Muslim subjects.[3] A hundred years later, the eldest son of the Dey of Tunis, Ahmed Kohja, escaped to Palermo and was baptised there in 1646 as Don Philippe.[4] But when he returned to Tunis in 1650 he apostatised.[5]

In East Africa, we even have an example of a Muslim prince who was converted to Catholicism and then found a seat on a throne – but it ended in disaster. In 1626 the Portuguese installed Jerónimo Chingulia as a puppet ruler of Mombasa, Malindi and Pemba, after thorough-going indoctrination at the hands of Augustinians as a child. In 1631 Jerónimo – or Yusuf bin Hasan – not only apostatised but massacred the Portuguese garrison at Fort Jesus and tried to raise up the Swahili coast in opposition to them.[6] Such is the consistent pattern: What few and minor examples as we do have are always the result of desperate attempts by contenders looking to win office by gaining external support rather than in situ monarchs of independent territories; on those rare occasions when power itself was achieved, apostasy followed.[7] In Mughal India, the Jesuits became excited at the prospect of the emperor Jahangir's conversion at one point, particularly in 1610 when he allowed three of his nephews to be baptised. But, as so often, the missionaries were misled by game-playing in the mode of religious diplomacy. The princes apostatised a few years later, and many scholars agree with European observers that the intention all along was precisely to render them illegitimate contenders for power.[8]

[3] Baskins 2022: 249. Amida's son, in exile in Palermo, was baptised as Carlos d'Austria in 1575 but never held power: Baskins 2019.

[4] Bonnery 2003.

[5] Petrolini et al., eds. 2022: 88. Thanks to Vincenzo Lavenia and Chiara Petrolini for discussion.

[6] Boxer and Azevedo 1960.

[7] Compare the case of Sultan Hasan IX of the Maldives, who was overthrown after installation as a converted puppet king (Strathern 2017: 47), or Tabarija of Ternate (Maluku), who was baptised in 1537 but apostatised on the throne (Saldanha 1991: 236–8). Jeléen, the Bumi of Jolof, travelled to Lisbon in 1488 and was baptised with much pomp, but ended up murdered on the way back (MMA II, 529–63). In the twelfth/thirteenth centuries, two princes of the vassal state of Erzurum converted from Islam to Christianity in order to win the hand of Christian queens of Georgia (Peacock 2011: 79, 83).

[8] Melo 2022: 158–60; Flores and Javier 2015: 91–2; Faruqui 2012: 33. Jahangir's interest in Christianity cannot be reduced to realpolitik, as it was also informed by the millennial–universalist mode of Mughal self-sacralisation (Moin 2012: 178–9), but this too was not remotely equivalent to conversion.

Indeed, more generally, how successful have been attempts at Christian proselytisation among Muslim populations? It is true that the common assumption among Iberians that Muslim regions could only really be converted by conquest reflected their long history of holy wars with Muslim foes, and their paranoia about Jewish and Muslim minorities in their midst.[9] Even the forced assimilation of Jews and Muslims did not appear to erase their ancestral religion, which thus became something configured in the blood itself – a conflation of culture and genealogy with fateful consequences.[10] As over-determined as their pessimism about voluntary conversions among Muslims was, however, it also turned out to be rather realistic. For hiding underneath what looks like another item of disreputable missionary discourse lurks a genuine insight: rival monotheisms – 'the infernal sect of Muhammad and the pestilential Jews' – were a miserably infertile field for missionary action, absent the coercive apparatus of the state, while 'gentile' societies were more promising.[11] Missionaries in seventeenth-century Southeast Asia commented on how difficult it was to convert Muslims above all others. Even in Melaka, where the Portuguese conquered and ruled, this held good.[12] Michael Cook has observed 'that no pre-modern Muslim population of any size is known to have abandoned Islam for another religion without having first been conquered by unbelievers'.[13] In the modern period, this failure of Christianity amongst Muslim societies in all contexts 'stands in stark contrast to the reception accorded to Christianity in many parts of the non-Muslim world'.[14] It is with good reason, therefore, that Ronnie Po-chia Hsia has recently noted, 'Where Christianity ran up against the other global monotheistic religion, Islam, it made almost no progress. Catholic missionaries to the Ottoman and Safavid Empires in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were nibbling at crumbs, so to

[9] An influential text here (pre-1480) was by Georgius de Hungaria, who had been enslaved in the Ottoman empire for more than twenty years (Johnson 2011: 59). There were some voluntary conversions of Muslims to Christianity in Europe: Corrales 2020: 54–6.

[10] Nirenberg 2009.

[11] Gonçalo da Silveira, November 1559, *Documentos* (1962–1965) VII, 422–3, and see Almada 1984: 79; Bernadino de Escalante (1577), in Gasch-Tomás and Maillard-Álvarez 2018: 185; Prange 2018: 139; Chakravarti 2018: 95; Rubiés 2000: 8; Madigan 2016; Zami and Lorea 2016: 257–8.

[12] Alberts 2013a: 53; Smith 2011: 143.

[13] Cook 2014: 24.

[14] Cook 2014: 34; cf. Walls 1995.

speak, scoring at the most moderate successes among the non-Catholic Christian subjects of the Sultan and the Shah.'[15]

It is quite possible that readers will find this observation instinctively unsurprising. At only the crudest level of analysis, one can hardly ignore the fact that in many Muslim-governed societies, apostasy was officially punishable by death. But this, of course, may be considered a product of the way that Islam in many of its forms enshrined such a powerful version of the Mosaic distinction, which was itself a radical manifestation of the identity-bearing capacity of transcendentalism.[16] And Muslim intransigence holds regardless of extremely diverse political and legal contexts as was noted above. But in conceding this point, we have in fact established something rather significant: The power and reality of Islam as a 'structure' is simply unmistakeable. In at least one sense, then, it does not seem to matter so very much whether it is a region of the Ottoman Empire that is under consideration or a Portuguese-held city port on the Malay peninsula, whether the missionaries at work are accommodationist Jesuits or evangelical Protestants – the pattern still holds.[17]

Of course, the question may be turned on its head. How many Christian rulers have converted to a non-Christian religious system?[18] It is true that the question is a strained one, insofar as the global conjuncture rarely subjected Christian rulers to equivalent pressures of missionised religious diplomacy, for a variety of reasons. But European Christendom did at least have to negotiate with the dynamic reality of Islamic imperialism on its eastern and southern boundaries, which would normally create certain incentives or opportunities for conversion, even if it did not face any determined Islamic proselytisation.[19] But the characteristic response on both sides, at the level of

[15] Hsia 2018: 8. [16] Assmann 2014 on the Mosaic distinction.

[17] For the great majority of intellectual tasks, distinguishing between these contexts would be vital. On the difficulties of converting Sri Lankan Muslims to Catholicism or Calvinism under European colonialism: Dewaraja 1994: 70. Muslim communities in the Philippines proved 'to be an insurmountable obstacle' to its complete Christianisation (Hsia and Palomo 2019: 92).

[18] This chapter does not consider 'inter-schismatic' conversions, for example, between Catholicism and Protestantism, which *UP* 10 suggested belong to a different paradigm. Meanwhile apostasies in the first generation or two of dynastic conversion are dealt with in *UP* 289–91.

[19] Consider, for example, Birk 2016.

rulership (*not* necessarily of ordinary people), was instead one of mutual religious contra-distinction.[20]

Let us participate in a thought experiment proposed by Jean de La Bruyère reflecting on the Siam affair that had just culminated and imagine if the ambassadors from Ayutthaya had come to France with the secret objective of causing the Most Christian King to renounce Christianity: 'With what mockery and singular contempt would not we have heard such outrageous things!'[21] Many decades before, the provincial superior of the Franciscans in Manila had reflected similarly on the Japan mission. In 1604, he reported that the Japanese consider the missionaries rather mad, for their project was as plausible as a group of Japanese journeying to Spain or Rome and intending to spread the teachings of 'their sect' there.[22] Such are the moments of relativising insight that the missionary encounter with the transcendentalist milieus of Japan and Thailand might stimulate. But note that this rare sensation of the strangeness of the missionary project derived from the obvious laughability of the notion that Christian rulers might convert at the exhortation of foreign clerics.[23] Surely, instinctively, we would agree.

If we are content to follow this line of reasoning, we would find ourselves at the conclusion that monotheism – as abstract and etic a meta-category as it is – may be conceived as the more fundamental structure militating against ruler conversion. Again, this might strike some as intuitive, given what we know of the distinctive ways that monotheists distinguish between the devout and the depraved and found salvation upon loyalty to an omnipotent and jealous deity. But, once this is granted, it is surely no less reasonable to ask whether other religious categories – no less 'artificial', in some senses – might be also used to reveal more structured patterns. What of Theravada Buddhism, for example, which was also the source of much missionary frustration?[24]

[20] Some individual Christians converted to Islam in order to seek opportunity in the Ottoman empire, but this only underlines the importance of religious affiliation to the social and political sphere.

[21] La Bruyère 2015: 455.

[22] Diego de Bermeo to Governor Acuña, 23 December 1604, AGI Filipinas 79 N. 47. Thanks to Natalie Cobo.

[23] Admittedly, Bermeo's comment is not about rulers per se.

[24] See below.

Take a step backwards and consider the religious map of the world as it shifted over the time span of this book. Now remove those areas in which any such transformations occurred under the aegis of imperial conquest – in which the Cross or Crescent advanced by merely following the sword. This would mean setting aside much of the New World, in particular the areas that became subject to Portuguese and Spanish dominion in the sixteenth century.[25] Given that ruling figures in this region were sometimes able to retain a degree of independence in the generation or two immediately following conquest, there may be some room to concede to them a degree of religious autonomy. In Mesoamerica, this might include the last Zapotec King Cosijopi, who was baptised as Don Juan Cortés following the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521 and ruled for a while in Tehuantepec as a favoured vassal of the Habsburgs.[26] We might look at local elites taking the initiative in conversion in order to consolidate their power in regions far from any real Spanish control.[27] Nevertheless, for all the current emphasis on indigenous agency in Latin American historiography, the way in which the Iberians simply decapitated the political hierarchy of the dominant imperial entities, destroying existing institutions of sacred kingship, and were subsequently empowered to launch suppressions of local ritual practice provides the overwhelmingly important frame of analysis. Religious diplomacy quickly gave way to religious coercion and a long slow process of cultural adjustment.

This leaves two stretches of the world that were dominated by immanentist traditions: the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa. The chiefly societies of Polynesia were subject to one of the most rapid dynamics of ruler conversion anywhere in world history, from Pomare II of Tahiti in 1812 to Cakobau of Fiji in 1854, as described in the companion volume.[28] Africa south of the Sahara represents a far vaster region – in terms of both landmass and population – and a more variegated one.

[25] I have been unable to address North America here, a region that might yield cases where local elites could engage with Christianity with relative parity in the early modern period – although the paucity of royal figures renders comparison more difficult. Compare Amazonia: Viveiros de Castro 2011: 36.

[26] Zeitlin and Thomas 1992. The immediate conversion of four lords of Tlaxcala in 1519 is a later myth: Gibson 1952: 30–4.

[27] Worth 2002: 57: local chiefs in Spanish Florida engaged missionaries intent on 'maintaining or enhancing internal political power'.

[28] Strathern 2019: 276.

Naturally, therefore, it presents a correspondingly more complex picture and helps underline that there was nothing remotely automatic about the conversion of immanentist rulers merely brought into contact with transcendentalism for the first time. This book has dwelled upon the extraordinary success of Christianity in Kongo, and Chapter 1 discussed the willingness of a number of African chiefs and rulers to engage with missionaries and even receive baptism under the heading of religious diplomacy – although undoubtedly the appeal of new ritual techniques of immanent power was also germane here.[29] But there was no movement of African rulers towards Christianity to match what happened in the Pacific; local forms of sacred kingship retained a powerful hold, in some ways, into the nineteenth century and beyond – a reminder of immanentism's staying power in certain contexts.[30] It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, when European imperialism became a greater force in the interior, that Christianity began to make real inroads across the ruling figures of the continent. Perhaps a greater disparity in material power had shifted the economy of ritual efficacy. But the diverse forms of religion and sacralised political authority across this region continued to help shape divergent responses to Christianity.[31]

Indeed, it is only by taking one further step back and considering the progress of Islam as well that the overall vulnerability of African religio-political systems becomes most apparent. It was slowly and unevenly that Islam and Christianity devoured the religious systems of the continent, both at the level of the court and the village, but the pattern is clear.[32] Islam appears to have been more successful here for several reasons. Firstly, its expansion took place over a longer chronology and over the interior from the north and the east.[33] Second, the disease barrier massively hindered the continuity of European missionary work attempting to make its way in from the coast.[34] This was particularly important because Catholicism needed ordained priests in

[29] See Chapter 1, pp. 29–32 on religious diplomacy in Africa, and Strathern 2018.
[30] Hastings 1994: 311–3. [31] Hastings 1994: 461.
[32] Strathern 2018; Leftzion and Pouwels 2000.
[33] Ghana converted to Islam in the eleventh century, and by the thirteenth century the great Muslim charter-state for West Africa, Mali, had begun to flourish (Kaba 1984: 244). See Chapter 1, pp. 31–2 for the limitations to the field of religious diplomacy set up by the Portuguese in Africa.
[34] Harper 2021: 289–96 for the extraordinary mortality rates of Europeans in West Africa. Also Boxer 1969b: 246; 1978: 8; Sá 2007: 271.

order to carry out the most basic rituals, and losses to disease damaged the supply.[35] Third, the Christian emphasis on monogamy proved a major obstacle for rulers whose political status was constructed through multiple marital alliances, while Islam brought its own tradition of polygamy.[36] Fourth, the Catholic missionary impulse was more closely tied to European imperial interference and usually sought to implement stricter standards of exclusivist practice. Islam, by contrast, was carried by traders, holy men and scholars travelling to new courts to find patronage on local terms. The result was often a deeply immanentised form of Islam, and one that had to co-exist with other religious practices and traditions. This produced not only greater success in the long-run but also the reformist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which served to assert the hegemony of more exclusivist and transcendentalist forms.[37] Moving away from rulers to popular movements, Christianity then found success in Africa from the late-nineteenth century under colonialism, albeit frequently in indigenous-led forms. Confounding expectations that its influence was inextricably tied to colonial authority, the dynamic gathered most momentum following decolonisation in the later twentieth century.[38]

The pattern that appears most striking, however, is rather the religious and philosophical resilience of South Asia, East Asia and mainland Southeast Asia, and particularly the rulers of its principal states. Of course, the partial exception of Japan has been considered in detail above, and some further important qualifications and complexities are explored in the closer look at the Asian regions below. But we shall find that in all these societies that were the heirs of transcendentalist or 'Axial' traditions – Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism – in none of them did Christianity take root as an enduring legitimating tradition of rulership. As Tara Alberts puts it, 'Missionary hopes for an Asian

[35] The Portuguese failure to truly promote indigenous clergy was therefore a grave weakness. Hastings 1994: 69, 128–9.

[36] Report on Kingdom of Arda, 17 July 1662, MMA XII, 381; Francisco de Gouveia, 1 January 1564, MMA XV, 232; Law 1991a: 61; Rüther 2009: 256; Iliffe 1995: 154; Hastings 1994: 54, 312–7.

[37] For example, Gomez 2018: 76.

[38] Stanley 2018: 58. Thus, it is in the broadest frame of ruler and popular conversions over the long-term that sub-Saharan Africa's religious vulnerability becomes apparent.

Constantine were not met.'[39] This was despite the fact that the region stimulated – forced – the most sophisticated missionary attempts to understand and accommodate pre-existing intellectual traditions that had ever been devised. Indeed, the philosophical labours involved in contending with the challenge posed by the Asian traditions would eventually come to shape the European Enlightenment.[40] Yet the end result of the missions themselves was a decisive failure to reproduce the early medieval conversion of Europe. Islam, meanwhile, as in sub-Saharan Africa, made significant ground in the courts of maritime Southeast Asia, again considered below, but otherwise tended to make little headway among rulers of these societies with established Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian traditions.

Existing Observations of Asian Intransigence

Surely, this rather obvious cultural geography must have received previous comment? Although *ruler conversion* per se has not been the focus of concern, there has been some recognition of patterns at the level of *general conversions* to Christianity globally. However, very rarely have these observations stimulated the overt deployment of theoretical machinery that might allow us to fully make sense of them. Once upon a time, perhaps, there was no need for explicit theorisation because common sense cultural hierarchies and evolutionary paradigms already carried the burden of explanation: that more 'civilized' or 'advanced' traditions were bound to achieve victory.[41] Thus, in his mid-twentieth-century, seven-volume history of Christian expansion, the American Baptist historian Kenneth Scott Latourette could be unabashed at assessing regions in terms of missionary success or failure and relating this in turn to the nature of the pre-existing religion – with more 'sophisticated' religions primed to defeat more 'primitive' ones.[42] For many good reasons, this language and the premises it encodes have now become unacceptable. Hence, perhaps, the explanatory lacunae that now persists.

In the 1960s, the pioneering historian of Iberian imperialism Charles Boxer certainly noted the pattern. He suggested, tentatively,

[39] Alberts 2013a: 85. [40] Rubiés 2016; 2012.
[41] See references to Voltaire on p. 37. [42] Latourette 1937–1947: 47.

the following about the early modern Spanish and Portuguese missionary efforts:

> Muslims and Jews with a few insignificant and individual exceptions, remained impervious to Christian propaganda, save only where it was forcibly imposed, as on Muslim women taken in war. The same applied to Hindus, in so far as the higher castes were concerned. A notable exception was the mass conversion to Christianity in Goa and the surrounding districts of the bulk of the inhabitants, including the Brahmins by a mixture of carrot and stick methods between 1540 and 1570. Similarly, the Buddhists of the Hinayana ('Little Vehicle') school remained basically unaffected by Christian evangelism in Burma, Siam, Laos and Cambodia. Adherents of the Mahayana School in Japan and China proved more responsive to the Gospel message, although I cannot explain why that should have been so. Culturally divided regions, such as Ceylon with its Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese were likewise far from barren grounds partly at any rate because the Portuguese destroyed the local temples and banished the indigenous priests.[43]

The pattern Boxer observes may be clarified once we notice that the exceptions to the intransigence of high-caste Hindus (i.e., in Goa) and Theravada Buddhists (in lowland Sri Lanka) simply concern these areas that were under Portuguese imperial rule.[44] Much of the logic of intransigence discussed in this book applies much less strongly in contexts where people have become subject to a new conquest elite.[45] A rather different calculus of motivation operated here, including (but not confined to) the effects of various coercive measures.[46] What really concerns us here is the resistance of Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists *outside* imperial dominion. Boxer does not offer an explicit explanation for this, although in another work on Dutch imperialism he refers to the capacity of 'active' religious faiths to repel the efforts of Calvinist proselytisation across Asia (which raises the baffling prospect of what an 'inactive' religion might be).[47]

[43] Boxer 1978: 96.

[44] The reference to culturally divided regions is a red herring. The Lankan case is explained at length in Strathern 2007a, but note that only a distinct minority ever converted to any variety of Christianity during almost five hundred years of colonial rule. Hence Etherington, below, can note Ceylon's resistance.

[45] Discussed further in the section, pp. 363–9 below.

[46] Coercion in Goa: Xavier 2007: 283.

[47] Boxer 1965: 153: 'Whenever there was an active religious faith, such as Islam in Indonesia, Hinduism in India, Buddhism in Ceylon or Roman Catholicism in the

More recently, other historians have noted the essential pattern – as maintaining across different periods of history and across all regions, even including, to some extent, areas subject to colonial governance. Chris Wickham notes that the difference between polytheism and monotheism might seem a good distinction for generalising about vulnerability, but it 'founders if the counterexample of Indian Hinduism is invoked, against which Christianity made almost no inroads at all in the century and a half of Christian British rule'.[48] So, in some sense, Hinduism has to be placed alongside monotheism. Norman Etherington, writing about the modern period, appeals to different criteria:

> The areas that proved most resistant to Christian evangelizing whether by European or by indigenous agents were regions dominated by *well-entrenched universalizing creeds and sacred written texts*. [italics added] Outside the Empire this was best demonstrated in China and Japan. Within the formal Empire, resistance was stiffest in South Asia, where the appearance of missionaries produced a backlash of religious revitalisation among Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. Where such competing religions were deeply rooted among large populations, as in Burma, Ceylon, and the sub-Saharan Sudanic regions, imperial authority did little to advance the cause of Christian missions.[49]

Christopher Bayly – again referring to the failures of Christian missionaries of all denominations to make headway in India, China or Japan – notes that 'the hierarchies of the religions of these countries were powerful and literate, and they quickly began to fight back and "write back" against Christianity, using print media and movements of proselytisation themselves.'[50] Thus we learn that there was something about the capacity of these traditions to mount aggressive counter-actions that is significant: their capacity to quickly twist into missionary mode themselves. They seemed to thrive, too, amidst the opportunities and challenges of modernity. In part, this was because they twinned somehow with the drives towards collective identity-formation produced by anti-colonial reaction, nationalist self-assertion and democratic mobilisation. Yet it must be noted that their resilience

places settled by the Portuguese, Calvinism could make no lasting impression once the state support for this creed was withdrawn.'

[48] Wickham 2016: 14. [49] Etherington 2005: 8.

[50] Bayly 2004: 349, which also notes the historic low status of Christians in Asia.

long predated any modernising dynamics of print, public sphere mobilisation, 'Protestantisation' or reconstitution as a 'world religion'.

Bayly also hints at the organisational capacity of these traditions. 'Organised religion' is quite frequently invoked without spelling out what that means or why it should be significant: Presumably it is the presence of an institutionalised clerisy that is being invoked here. Similarly, it is rarely explained why, exactly, texts should matter? As with Etherington above, Diarmaid MacCulloch notes the problems faced by missionaries working among 'cultures based on faiths also claiming a universal message or with the potential to do so: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism'.[51] What is it about universalism that is so obdurate? Is Hinduism universalising?[52] Michael Pearson, referring to the failures of Islam to make serious inroads into Hinduism refers to Hindus already having 'a firmly entrenched higher tier of belief already'.[53] This refers to something inherent in the nature of the pre-existing religious system that obviates the attraction of functionally similar systems. But what does it mean to say that some religions have a 'higher tier' – and some, presumably, only 'lower' ones? Some time ago, Gananath Obeyesekere was more sociologically expansive, referring to the failures of modern missionaries among societies 'with indigenous great traditions like Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism', and referred to the way that the latter created expansive moral communities endowed with a certain 'cultural self-consciousness of the greatness of the religious tradition' and 'an organisation of literate and educated religious specialists who could meet the missionary challenge effectively'.[54]

Transcendentalist Intransigence

All of these insights are circling around something important without quite touching it. That something, I suggest, is transcendentalism.

[51] MacCulloch 2009: 879.
[52] Compare Elison 1981a: 82 on Japanese intransigence as a function of universalist ideology.
[53] Pearson 2003: 77.
[54] Obeyesekere 1979: 629–30; also Harris 2006. Compare MacCulloch 2009: 704, noting the problems faced by missionaries without military backing working among 'Asian peoples with age-old and subtle cultures, full of self-confidence'.

David Lindenfeld has recently noted how the pattern of propensity to conversion may be explained by distinguishing those areas that had not previously been touched by Axial traditions (sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific especially) from those that had. Meanwhile 'within axial societies such as China and India, Christianity has found its strongest appeal among those groups that have been excluded from or marginalized by the literate elites: women, ethnic minorities, untouchables'.[55] Lindenfeld explains these patterns by reference to the critical factor of literacy. Amongst the non-Axial societies, missionaries brought this powerful new technology for the first time; amongst the Axial ones, the written word was already long established.[56] No doubt this was a significant factor driving popular conversion in modern (especially colonial) scenarios where missionaries could become almost monopolistic vehicles for education and literacy. We have seen, indeed, that literacy played a role in Hawaii, and Afonso of Kongo came to value it.[57]

Yet, the presence or absence of literacy is surely merely a proxy for a range of much deeper factors intrinsic to transcendentalism. Many of these will already be evident from the way transcendentalism was defined in *Unearthly Powers* and in Chapter 1 of this book, and will have been drawn out in the case chapters. But at the risk of both repetition and over-condensation, a brief summary of the chief mechanisms may be convenient.[58] Much of the following will be relevant to explaining both popular conversion and ruler conversion – although it is the latter pattern that this chapter has primarily in its sights.

Immanentist religious cultures are not open to conversion from the outside in any absolute or straightforward way: There are many reasons why giving up traditional modes and objects of worship may be difficult and even repugnant. But, in the absence of notions of religious identity, textualised orthodoxy or offensive truth claims, these religious systems set up few barriers to a selective importation of new ritual practices and metapersons. J. D. Y. Peel noted that outside the world religions, ritual activity is largely concerned with access to metaperson-derived 'power', and this involves an

[55] Lindenfeld 2017: 69. Also see Cohen 1991; 1995.
[56] Lindenfeld 2021: 206; Stanley 2018, ch. 3.
[57] Although literacy did not generate popular movements in early modern Africa in the way that happened in the nineteenth-century Pacific.
[58] See *UP* chs. 1 and 4.

experimental pragmatism that predisposes people towards religious innovation and experimentation.[59] As explained in the introduction, this produces an 'economy of ritual efficacy' within which more efficacious metapersons and means of communicating with them may win favour. Monotheistic missionaries are equipped with features that allow them to stimulate this economy, gain an advantage in it and then, once conversion has been achieved, relegate it to secondary importance.

To be sure, since immanent power always remains of vital importance, it may indeed become a site of competition in *any* religious setting, as the Japan case study underlines in particular. But transcendentalist traditions were able to draw upon certain forms of conceptual control to match that of their Christian missionaries. All transcendentalist traditions drew strength from the way in which their foundational teachings were withdrawn from empirical jeopardy. If their adherents suffered reversals of worldly fortune, this could find cognitive resolution through the greater imperatives of cosmic–salvific time. Indeed, flourishing in this world might even be disparaged, while ritual activity itself, in more reformed versions of transcendentalism, came to lose its place as the definitive mode of religious action. Missionaries found themselves up against existing soteriologies founded in existing scriptures and had to explain why their account of what salvation was and how to obtain it was preferable. What was at stake for the missionised in these societies was not just the quality of their mortal existence but the aeons of time that would follow it: the afterlife, whether in heavens or hells, in lower or higher reinstantiations. And no one could empirically disprove their reality. Images of hellish afterlives adorned the temples of Theravada Buddhist societies, for example, reminding them of the fate awaiting those who failed in their ethical-soteriological quest. In some contexts, abandoning the Buddhist path through conversion was directly associated with a hellish existence.[60] Once people have become used to caring for their quality of post-mortem existence, it is difficult to underestimate the psychological grip this may exert.

[59] Peel 1977: 126–7, referring to 'ethnic' or 'traditional' religions, while 'Islam and Buddhism confer such strong (and distinctively religious) identities that their adherents are highly reluctant to abandon them'.

[60] Bradley 1862: 67.

This has particular implications for kingship, for, where a soteriological vision has embedded itself among the population, the potential social power it generates becomes an energy that the state ignores at its peril. Rulers are no longer only conduits for worldly flourishing but may be construed as vital mechanisms for the soteriological fate of their realms: That is to say, the salvation of all may be tied to the conduct of the righteous ruler and their capacity to act as an exemplar of piety and morality, to patronise and reform sangha, church, ulema.[61] Thus, it may be understood, implicitly or even explicitly, that if they reject this role for a false understanding of soteriology, their legitimacy will be damaged. Across much of Asia, forms of sacred kingship tended to combine both righteous and divinised elements to varying degrees; the office was thus framed as a collective mechanism for obtaining both this-worldly and other-worldly well-being. Furthermore, and this is an important point that is easy to overlook, potential convert rulers had to understand that their own salvation was at stake. Reminding them of such matters was a clerisy – bhikkhus, ecclesiastics, jurists – with whom they were ever locked into dialogue. These clerisies held much of the social power of religion in their hands and wielded a cognitive power and moral authority – founded upon the irrefutable basis of canonised scripture – that rulers simply could not ignore. Frequently, this was translated into political and fiscal power too.

Another obvious point is equally easy to overlook: The principal transcendentalist traditions were simply prone to *attempt* expansion, as monks, Sufis, missionaries and holy men were impelled to take their teachings abroad. This characteristic is surely the primary intuition behind the concept of 'world religions' – but it follows from some of the central defining features of transcendentalism, above all its 'universalist' qualities to which a number of the historians mentioned above referred. From a purely Darwinian perspective, those religions that are primed to expand and to subjugate rival forms will simply enjoy a certain advantage over the long term. More subtly, it meant that such traditions inevitably created expansive ecumenes – or civilisational zones, or macro-regional orders – which inducted diverse ruling courts into a wider vision that established norms of political legitimacy, civility and the aesthetics of power. Rulers on the outside of these

[61] Lieberman 2009: 236.

sprawling trans-local imaginaires might find themselves drawn into them (unless they belonged to competing ones) and thereby start to construe their status in the terms they set up. For rulers are not only anxious about their image in relation to their subjects but also with regard to other rulers near and far. More prosaic elements of power also circulated among these ecumenes: commerce, diplomacy, law codes, literacy, literary genres, practices of government all travelled along the fibres of the web along with scriptures and saints. These institutional networks engendered certain forms of resilience. For example, the Mahāvihāra tradition, which defined what would later be considered Theravada Buddhism, almost did not survive the Cōḷa occupation of Sri Lanka, but the Sinhalese king Vijayabāhu I (r. 1070–1112) was able to draw on the help of monks from Myanmar to restore the sangha.[62]

This is a highly condensed account of certain core features, which glides over some extremely significant differences between the major traditions (not to mention within them over time and space). Consider, for example, the extent to which Confucianism or Hinduism fits the paradigm in the preceding chapter; or the way in which, in Asia, many such traditions are likely to combine to create a plural cultural field; or the emphasis in *Unearthly Powers* on the distinction between Indic and monotheistic forms of transcendentalism with regard to the policing of group boundaries. Or, again, we may wish to focus on certain distinctive features of Theravada Buddhism, in grasping hold of the way the clerisy's institutional autonomy was rather strongly limited while its moral authority remained strongly intact. Some of these divergences are indicated in the discussion below on the macro-regions.

Indeed, all the 'mechanisms' summarised above must be considered not simply in binary terms (as absent/present) but as operative to greater or lesser degrees depending on historical vicissitudes. It might take considerable time for a transcendentalist tradition such as Buddhism to come to serve the core Durkheimian functions of society and polity, to define the teleocracy of the state and to embed itself into the daily lives of large sections of the population. The more this has happened, the more 'established' we may consider it and the more of an obstacle, we may hypothesise, it will present to missionary designs.[63] And we might ask, whose judgement on the legitimacy of

[62] Frasch 2017: 72; 1998; Blackburn 2023: 186. [63] See Strathern 2007b: 368.

the ruler really matters? Which groups are politically relevant in that sense will vary greatly from case to case. For that matter, what do we mean by 'ruler'? Warlords, parvenus and foreign conquerors may not yet have woven convincing claims of sacred kingship around their claims to power. These notes merely gesture to a handful of a much broader set of relevant variables.

Missionary Methods

One variable may be somewhat conspicuous by its absence in the discussion thus far, and that is the model of conversion brought by the proselytisers themselves, specifically the latitude they gave to the continuing expression of pre-existing religious forms. In general, scholarship has paid a great deal of attention to missionary methods and perceptions, which is one reason why this book has deliberately trained its focus on the dynamics of the host society instead. Yet clearly the approach taken by missionaries must be brought into the equation. The question of how much pluralism or ambiguity they will allow is potentially significant because a legitimacy crisis may be more likely to be provoked by the rejection of the old cults than by an acceptance of a new one. This is one reason why of the two proselytising Abrahamic traditions it was Islam that enjoyed the most successful expansion in the early modern period.[64] As mentioned above, in expanding to parts of Africa, maritime Southeast Asia and Bengal, and in converting Inner Asian conquest groups, Islam surely profited from its capacity to countenance a quarantined, plural or syncretic stage of adoption – a product of the mediating felicities and immanentist tendencies of monist theologies, certain forms of Sufism, the absence of a central hierarchical structure equivalent to the Catholic Church, and the way its expansion was less clearly associated with aggressive imperial expansion, amongst other reasons.[65] This gradualism was surely an

[64] Bulliet 2004: 40–1; Ditchfield 2022: 187.

[65] Pearson 2003: 76; Lieberman 2009: 841. On Mongols, Jackson 2009: 118; on Bengal, Eaton 1993: 273–69. The role of Sufi brotherhoods in the expansion of Islam in Southeast Asia and elsewhere has been contested or nuanced (e.g., van Bruinessen 2019; Laffan 2011), but what is underlined here is not necessarily the role of *ṭarīqas* in spear-heading proselytism but the Sufi-inflected nature of the 'Islam' that was brought to non-Muslim areas.

advantage in gaining an initial foothold.[66] It is likely that some similar flexibilities attended ruler conversions to Christianity in early medieval Europe too, somewhat obscured by our late and partial sources.[67] The Kongo case study suggested that the early conversion of its kings in the 1490s and their capacity to exert control over the Christianisation process may have allowed the continuation of older, divinised forms of sacred monarchy and the undeniable continuation of local religiosity in some form among the population at large. However, the more the Church and religious orders exercised supervision, and the more reformist energies heightened monotheistic anxieties over boundary-transgression, the more that opportunities for organic forms of rapprochement were diminished.[68]

Nevertheless, this dimension of analysis does not produce anything like a rule, for strict and exclusivist forms of conversion have their own appeal, it would seem. Across the early nineteenth century Pacific, various Protestant sects set unusually high standards of baptism, taking pride in the grudging manner in which they conceded neophyte adequacy – and found massive success among its high chiefs not only in Hawaii but across the region.[69] In immanentist settings, rupture might be welcomed; iconoclasm might serve societal and political needs both; reformist and doctrinalist forms of common cult might promise riches of social power; and, if it could be demonstrated that the Christian deity would reward his followers more effectively than the old pantheon, then this could prove decisive. Turning once again, to more general patterns of conversion, the work of Joel Robbins on Papua New Guinea has brought the capacity of highly reformed Christianity to induce swift and complete group conversion to the attention of anthropology, while the contemporary success of Evangelical groups who insist upon a radical rejection of all that went before is clear.[70]

[66] Fernão de Queyroz 1992: 700. [67] Fletcher 1998: 240, 253–71.

[68] A more conscious and philosophically focussed Catholic strategy of establishing common ground with Asian high cultures (accommodation) did develop in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but this must be distinguished from organic forms of inter-mixing and pluralism, such as we find in Kongo, for example.

[69] For example, Linnekin 2008: 198–9 on Vanuatu.

[70] Robbins 2004; 2012; Paredes 2006: 539.

Some Reflections on Religious Change and Legitimation among Early Modern Conquest Elites: The Ottomans, Mughals, Manchus and Mongols

The mechanisms of established transcendentalisms that might obstruct ruler conversion cannot be taken to imply that, once these societies have been conquered, they will be unable to accept the authority of imperial rulers adhering to a different tradition. This is a very different scenario to that of ruler conversion. Everywhere populations found themselves subject to new overlords, the realities of hard power or the benefits of acquiescence were likely to trump other considerations. Some of them may well even convert to the religion of these overlords, as did a proportion (albeit a distinct minority) of Theravada Buddhists in Sri Lanka to the various forms of Christianity brought by the Portuguese, Dutch and British; as Brahmins did in Goa; and as many Christians of West Asia gradually did as they came under the jurisdiction of empires fashioned by Muslim Arab and Turkic elites.[71] Naturally, the clerisy will be appeased the more they are patronised by the imperial elite and the more they are granted management of their internal religious affairs.[72] No longer competing with the ruler for pre-eminence in the sphere of sacred authority might even bring certain benefits. Lower levels of sacral kingship might also be allowed to persist under imperial suzerainty.[73] Moreover, religious discourses and images only ever form part of the architecture of political legitimacy: Substantial buttressing may take the form of more secular and universal claims around the possession of royal blood or the provision of security, prosperity and justice.

Yet if we move to try to understand ruler conversion dilemmas per se, it becomes evident that the more 'imperial' a polity is – that is to say, the more that ruling elites claim supremacy over many diverse peoples each with their own religious practices and affinities – the more complex becomes the role of religion in helping shape the legitimacy of the rulers. It is typical, for example, for imperial dynasties to attempt to

[71] Cook 2014: 24, and chapters in Hurvitz 2020 for Christian conversion to Islam; see below for Goa and Sri Lanka. On a Georgian notable (Giorgi XI, or Gurgīn Khan) converting to serve the Safavids: Avery 1991: 11.

[72] Faroqhi 2010: 256–7 on Ottomans. Brahmin scribes serving Muslim rulers: Guha 2010; later EIC religious patronage in India: Bayly 1987: 114.

[73] Bayly 1987: 112.

combine elements of the symbolism of kingship from several of their subject groups. At one extreme this may amount to a form of 'chameleon ritualism', in which the visage of sacral kingship morphs in relation to the audience it happens to be addressing. Indic and Sinic forms of transcendentalism – as per their 'dialogical' tendencies – placed relatively few limits to such plural or combinatory displays. However, one can usually identify a dominant transcendentalism reflecting the sensibility of a core moral community of vassals whose loyalties are particularly vital – often, the wider conquest elite with whom the dynasty is aligned. Where these vassals adhere to a monotheistic tradition, it seems to place limits on the capacity of the ruler to represent multiple groups through sacred kingship.

There remain, of course, many other ways of establishing legitimacy or acquiescence that monotheist rulers may deploy in these circumstances. Hence the Ottomans came to rule over a large number of Jews and Christians of different denominations, whose continuing existence they famously protected and even patronised, and after the conquest of Constantinople in some sense took on the legacy of Rome. The need to generate an ecumenical discourse of authority to match their imperial pretensions was therefore strong indeed, as is most notable in the time of Mehmed (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481), the conqueror of Byzantium.[74] In an inscription on the Jaffa Gate to the Old City of Jerusalem, Süleyman I (1520–1566) audaciously twists the Shahada itself to serve the same imperial imperative: 'There is no God but Allah and Ibrahim is his close friend.'[75] Replacing the reference to Muhammad with that to Abraham, the father of all the Abrahamic monotheisms, was surely a calculated move.[76] Still from a very abstract comparative perspective, we must notice that Ottoman sultans

[74] Casale 2022 describes Mehmed deploying the legacy of Rome and the immanentist potential of both Renaissance and Timurid Neoplatonism to conceive of his rule as uniting and transcending the different monotheistic traditions – but much of his vision was erased by his successors.

[75] Many thanks to Reuven Amitai for showing this to a group of conference-goers and to him and Azfar Moin for discussion.

[76] Compare Krstić 2011: 87: Süleyman aspired 'like Constantine . . . to bring about the unification of religions under imperial and presumably Islamic auspices'; thanks to Tijana Krstić for discussion. Ottoman sultans could experiment with non-Islamic forms of royal self-representation (Necipoğlu 1989; Fleischer 2018: 63) and titles (basileus, caesar) to appeal to their diverse subjects (Kołodziejczyk 2012), while millenarian visions might fertilise many different traditions without requiring any overt shift in religious affiliation (Fleischer 2007; 2018: 63).

could not in any substantial way play the part of a Christian monarch. Even as the dynasty sought to diminish their dependence on Turkic warrior elites by drafting Christian boys from the Balkans through the *devşirme* to form their elite administrators and infantry units, this was a process that involved their Islamisation.[77]

The Ottoman boundary in the Balkans represents the western limits of what Victor Lieberman has characterised as Eurasia's vast 'exposed zone', which extended eastwards to the Sea of Japan. In this zone, the terrain and climate allowed huge cavalry armies to be sustained and deployed to devastating effect; Inner Asia acted as a generator of waves of conquest elites of nomadic origin who poured into the sedentary societies to the south.[78] It is no coincidence that these plains stretching across the lateral axis of Eurasia were also characterised by civilisational precocity (generating many of the earliest examples of agriculture, urbanisation, etc.) and the genesis of multiple and interacting Axial traditions – including possible variants that this book has not touched upon such as Manicheanism, Nestorianism and Zoroastrianism. Life here then meant dealing with spectacular but evanescent imperial systems and competing transcendentalisms.

Thus, there might be several groups on whose support new empires depended (i.e., different 'political communities'), each maintaining commitments to different transcendentalist traditions. Does this result in increasing pressure on the imperial ruler to adopt some sort of ecumenicism in response? This seems, at least, to be what happened when the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) ascended to the throne and sought out a more divinised role as a 'millennial being', a messianic figure who transcended the limitations of Islam itself. Many dimensions to his self-presentation exalt him as a sun-like being, a greater source of truth and justice than the narrow strictures of scripture. This is the apogee of certain long-standing dynamics in Islamic political theology and its increasing dominance by Sufism, as Azfar Moin has shown.[79] One very broad contextual development for the pre-eminence of Sufism was the way that the Mongol invasions of the

[77] Faroqhi 2010: 245.

[78] Lieberman 2009: 93–114. Inner Asia is 'that region lying generally north and east of the Black Sea; north of the Himalayas, Korea, and most of modern Iran; north and west of China proper; and south of the tundra and Siberian forest belt' (97).

[79] Including Sufism, sainthood, millenarianism, astrology. Moin 2012.

thirteenth century had previously undermined the 'established' qualities of the core institutions of ulema Islam and had, in various ways, deepened a rapprochement with immanentist religiosity.[80] But it also suited the growing pluralism of Akbar's circle of elite vassals, which came to include substantial numbers of Hindus.[81] The core political community was thus now highly diverse in terms of not just ethnicity but also religion, and, as for the wider population, this was now predominantly Hindu. Evidently, the 'Mosaic distinction' at the heart of monotheism had to be overcome. This did not mean fashioning a new syncretic cult.[82] Rather, it meant deploying sacred kingship as an ultimate source of authority upon which to establish *Sulh-i kull*: total peace – between all religions.[83]

Some decades after Akbar, a new empire arose in China as the Ming fell to invading Manchu forces from the north who propelled the Qing dynasty to the throne. The religious background of the conquerors was essentially immanentist – it is often referred to as shamanism – and this is surely what enabled the extraordinary ideological flexibility they demonstrated in constructing an imagery and ideology of rule.[84] The Qing were able to adopt long-standing Han Chinese traditions in the imagery, discourse and ritual practice of emperorship, and became exemplary patrons and disseminators of Confucianism in the eighteenth century.[85] The underlying principle here is simply the vast population imbalance between the Manchus and their Han subjects, who may have been militarily subdued but still had to be relied upon to provide the bureaucratic personnel to tax and manage such a huge territory. This was just one of the guises the Qing emperors adopted, chameleon-like, as they maintained their own shamanic rites while also presenting themselves in the idiom of Tibetan Buddhism in order to

[80] Moin MS, ch. 3 outlines some of the core structural changes. The role of the ulema changed too: Moin 2018.
[81] Eaton 2019: 231–7.
[82] Apparently 'syncretic' elements were not necessarily designed to secure legitimacy: The role of Christian motifs in developing Mughal sacral kingship cannot be connected to the rather negligible Christian political community. Moin MS.
[83] The Mughals consciously contrasted this with the bigotry of other Muslim states (Moin MS).
[84] Even before the conquest, the early Manchu state drew on different Inner Asian traditions including Tibetan Buddhism. LaGamma 2015: 89–92.
[85] Lieberman 2009: 544.

speak to the Inner Asian world they sought to dominate, and patronising Chan Buddhist and Daoist establishments too.[86] From a comparative perspective, what needs emphasising is how whole-heartedly the Qing were able to inhabit the ritual and ideological forms of their subjects belonging to quite different religious traditions – to a far greater degree than the Muslim dynasties of the Ottomans and even the Mughals were able to do.

The Manchus represent, in a sense, a much larger pattern: Inner Asian (Mongol–Turkic) conquest elites wielded immense military power over much of Eurasia for parts of the second millennium, and yet eventually, invariably, it was they who ended up converting to the religious, philosophical and cultural traditions of their long-sedentary subjects.[87] Jonathan Brack has illuminated the religious policies of the Mongols through recourse to the concept of immanentism.[88] Their famed 'tolerance reflected a typical immanentist lack of concern over religious boundaries'.[89] The various transcendentalist specialists their rule encompassed – Buddhist, Christian, Daoist and Muslim – were recognised as a different *type* of being to their own shamans. They were, for example, noted for their receipt of revelation through texts. But these 'clerical service estates' were drawn upon for their 'specialized skill of praying effectually to Heaven', which meant praying for the long life of the Khan: Thus they were corralled into the deeply immanentist objective of supplementary propitiation focussed on the fortune of the divinised ruler.[90] Christians or Muslims who refused to participate in ritual activity that might benefit the state were liable to be punished.[91]

Some of the language around the Mongol concept of Heaven (Tenggeri) may have carried an echo of an ethicised quality, possibly indicating some shared origin or mutual influence with the Chinese Mandate of Heaven thinking, although it is perhaps best conceived as a

[86] Waley-Cohen 2004: 199; Menegon and Cogan 2015: 391.
[87] Note Atwood 2022: 810 on 'the expectation that members of the Mongol ruling class would frequently adopt the *nom* [way of life] of the conquered people'.
[88] Brack 2022; 2021; compare Khazanov 1993: 463–4.
[89] Brack 2021: 24. Under Akbar, the Mughals explicitly celebrated Mongol tolerance as a pattern of rule: Gommans and Huseini 2022.
[90] Atwood 2022: 802. [91] Brack 2022: 821.

form of immanentist henotheism.[92] It could function thus as an overarching, hegemonic principle, reflecting and facilitating grand imperial claims.[93] This imperial ideology, centred on the figure of the ruler receiving the blessings of Heaven, was undoubtedly energised by the vast charisma accumulated by Chinggis Khan, for never in world history had the claims of universal empire been so extensively realised in practice. Thus, it is no surprise that for almost a century or so we have pagans ruling over populations containing large numbers of Muslims and Buddhists.[94] Such was the power of the Mongol achievements that they stood as a charter-state or reference point for subsequent imperial formations across the exposed zone.

And yet as the Mongol empire broke up, the rulers of its regional successor states converted to different varieties of transcendentalism.[95] The short-lived Yuan dynasty in China founded by Kublai Khan (r. 1260–1294) turned primarily to Tibetan Buddhism, a tradition with resonance across Inner Asia, thus forming a precedent for the later Qing.[96] The Ilkhanid state centred in Iran was heavily influenced by Buddhism for a phase, before turning to Islam, along with the other Mongol successors.[97] This pattern is replicated among the Turkic successor states: The Uighurs in Mongolia converted to Manicheanism, the Khazars on the Volga to Judaism, while the majority turned to Islam.[98]

Transcendentalist literati explicitly competed for the adherence of Mongol–Turkic elites, often finding ways of underlining the immanent power of their traditions.[99] This mutable phase among the successor states is primarily a reflection of political considerations: the shifting and diverse constituencies of warriors and others whose support rival leaders were vying for, together with their consciousness of 'religious diplomacy', that is, their need to forge alliances with other rulers.[100] For example, the key conversion in 1295 of the Ilkhanid ruler, Gazan

[92] Scholarship tends to underline how different Tenggeri was to monotheistic conceptions: Brack 2023: 75; Atwood 2022: 806; Jackson 2009: 113; Baumann 2013; Khazanov 1993. On shared origins: Golden 1982: 48; Chen 2002.
[93] *UP* 133. [94] Moin 2012: 25. [95] Brack 2021.
[96] Biran 2024: 245. [97] Prazniak 2014: 680. [98] Biran 2024: 245.
[99] Brack 2018; Strathern 2017.
[100] Pfeiffer 2006: 388 on extensive conversions among amirs in the thirteenth century before the first *Hülegüid* convert, Ahmad Tegüder (1282–1284), and also Biran 2002: 748, 751; Melville 1990: 171–72; Amitai 2013: 63, 70; DeWeese 2009: 121, 131–2.

Khan, has been attributed to the need to obtain the support of the Muslim Mongol emir Nawrūz in Khorasan or to appeal to the Mongols in Iran, who had already converted.[101] Yet, from another perspective, this process stands the expected 'hard power' understanding of cultural attraction on its head, for instead of the extraordinary achievements of the Mongols creating a dynamic of prestige that induced the subjects of the successor states to imitate them in religious terms, they instead succumbed to the gravitational pull of the transcendentalisms they had ruled over.

In another sense, to be sure, that dynamic of prestige did have a powerful and enduring legacy in terms of political theology: Chinggis Khan and then the partially Islamised Timur remained as irresistible models of imperial success, and this did serve to immanentise and Mongolise Islamic political theology in certain crucial ways. Süleyman I referred to himself as the 'Great Khan' [*khaqan*] in at least two inscriptions.[102] Akbar's lofty approach to religion may be seen as the culminating heir to this tendency, as indeed to the principle of accommodating plural religious traditions by subjecting them to the higher authority of a divinised ruler.[103] Yet Voltaire was right to observe the strange pattern of history by which certain triumphant conquest elites succumbed to the 'mores and religion' of the people they had vanquished, such as the Turks in relation to their Muslim subjects, the 'Tartars' (Manchus) in relation to the Han Chinese and the 'barbarians' in relation to the European peoples who had once been ruled by Rome.[104]

A Closer Look at South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia

South Asia

As the discussion of Hinduism in the previous chapter underlined, the religious field of non-Muslim South Asia encompassed enormous

[101] Melville 1990: 61; Amitai 2013: 70. Ghazan Khan had briefly patronised Buddhism, but the religion did not have substantial roots in the population (Brack 2022: 825; 2023: 23, 71). He may well, however, have maintained some traditional Mongol and Buddhist aspects of his kingship (Amitai-Preiss 1996).

[102] On a Sabil in Jerusalem: Auld et al. 2000: 677.

[103] Moin MS. This strategy is referred to as the 'transcendence of transcendence' in Strathern 2017: 36, and see Brack 2022.

[104] Voltaire 2009, vol. 3: 273.

diversity. Brahmins may have formed an important element of the wider cultural ecumene, but, in the absence of institutional or ideological tendencies towards central orthodoxy, they generated many diverse schools of thought and practice and could be de facto irrelevant to swathes of religious behaviour.[105] The ways in which ruling dynasties drew upon the sphere of religion to describe, justify and effect their rule were also, then, diverse and ever-changing. In short, how we characterise the nature of 'political theology' in South Asia must depend to a considerable extent on which particular cases we have in mind.[106]

We should not, then assume that the generalised account of Hinduism in Chapter 9 can stand in for such work in providing robust analyses of how specific forms of Indic sacralised kingship responded to monotheistic conversion attempts.[107] But can we see any congruence between the pattern of these responses and the implications of that generalised account? We may start simply by noting as a matter of historical fact that Hindu traditions of kingship seem to have been remarkably 'sticky' or intransigent in the face of the monotheistic challenge, resisting the diffusions of hard and soft power emanating from both Muslim and (to a far lesser degree) Christian elites in the second millennium. The following discussion is intended to establish the fact of this resilience on the part of rajas and their elite subjects and offer a few preliminary thoughts on the reasons behind it.[108]

As Turkic and Mongol conquest elites came to rule over great stretches of Central and West Asia, they gave up the immanentist traditions of their forefathers and were converted to the Islamic faith

[105] For example, Chakravarti 2018: 103–4.

[106] Pollock 2006: 431 argues that in South Asia the religious affiliation of rulers was irrelevant to their political authority or their subjects more broadly. This follows from an uncompromising rejection of legitimation theory (aimed at Dumont and Heesterman amongst others), which ultimately yields few means of bringing culture and power into analytical dialogue. See *UP* 110–14 for a critique of this critique.

[107] I do not consider intra-Indic ruler conversions of the first millennium here, in particular the supercession of Buddhism in India, a murky matter in which the crucial question of its establishment at a popular level is hard to answer. A contrast between Buddhism's role in Indian polities and the way that it took root as a fundamental teleocracy of state in Sri Lanka would, however, be revealing.

[108] The following discussion considers rulers in South Asia and enmeshed within its caste system. For Maritime Southeast Asia, see below.

of their subjects. But when these Islamised elites pushed into South Asia, they do not seem to have triggered any such conversions among the Hindu lords who owed them fealty or who ruled adjacent to them as rivals and allies. Indeed the problem of how to secure oaths of allegiance from these princes who refused to convert forced the first Muslim ruler to come to India, Mahmud of Ghazna, to ask for a finger sacrifice instead.[109] From this time (eleventh century) to that of the Mughals, it would seem that very few Hindu rulers of any note became Muslim – although this is an observation made somewhat hesitantly.[110] In the end, Muslim elites did manufacture very successful ways to secure the loyalties of their Hindu vassals, but this was a most protracted business, according to Peter Hardy. Under the early Delhi sultans, there is very little 'evidence of truly meaningful interaction which elicited the allegiance and active loyalties of the Hindu aristocrats'. This only changed as a result 'of forced Hindu acceptance of a harsh reality'.[111]

By the sixteenth century, Islamicate court culture, especially Persian forms of clothing, architecture, chronicle-writing and so on, came to occupy a prestigious regard across the region, as recent research has emphasised, including in the courts of Hindu rulers as at Vijayanagara.[112] Indeed the latter were included in the diplomatic ecumene of the sultanates.[113] Thus, if one element of royal self-presentation is always concerned with peer-to-peer status (rather than subject-facing legitimacy), the Islamicate world came to describe the means by which that status could be established.[114] The dynamic of cultural glamour described in Chapter 1 was therefore very much in evidence and clearly linked, in some form, to regional material success. Much scholarship now tends to be driven by a creditable impetus to resist religious fundamentalist–nationalist narratives at work in India by emphasising the more secular, cosmopolitan and boundary-crossing dimensions of its pre-modern past. Yet the more attention the appeal of

[109] Moin 2022: 740–1.
[110] More exhaustive research might yet reveal some cases. See discussion in Strathern 2017 for a few dubious cases. On the general limits of Islamic penetration, eleventh to thirteenth centuries: Wink 1997: 4–5, 294.
[111] Richards 1998: 10; Hardy 1998; Talbot 1995 on the protracted process of accommodation.
[112] Eaton 2017; Auer 2017. [113] Fischel 2022: 80–5.
[114] On royal peer consciousness: *UP* 159.

Islamicate or Persianate culture attracts as an example of 'pre-communalist' fluidity, the more it raises the question as to why the religious elements of this attractive cultural package had to be excised as it was absorbed by Hindu rulers and courts. Indeed, Philip Wagoner noted explicitly that Islamicisation pertained to 'secular culture' having 'nothing to do with religious conversion or syncretism', while the conduct of Hindu ritual performance, 'where it is conformity with brahmanical cultural norms that confers legitimacy', continued.[115]

At the more popular level, meanwhile, in most areas Muslim imperial rule did not lead to the mass conversions of subjects.[116] Some Rajput warrior clans did become Muslim to be sure; as always, imperial overlordship created material inducements to convert and a sense of prestige.[117] And it is certainly true, as much recent scholarship emphasises, that the long-lived cultural contact zone in South Asia produced many movements – of ascetics, *bhakti* cults, saint propitiation, shrine veneration – that largely ignored the boundaries between different Hindu and Muslim traditions.[118] But, as Richard M. Eaton has argued, in terms of conversion per se, Islam did not spread most strongly in those areas longest under Muslim governance but rather as one moved into the eastern part of the Bengal Delta, into the frontiers of rice cultivation, literacy and state construction.[119] Eaton pointed out that the distribution of Islamic conversion across South Asia was in fact partly explicable in terms of the nature of the

[115] Wagoner 1996; 854. In sixteenth-century Vijayanagara, royal patronage benefitted 'Hindu communities almost exclusively': Stoker 2016: 49.

[116] Rule over non-Muslim subjects was almost a structural feature of Muslim empires. Perhaps 10 per cent of the population converted to Islam (Pearson 2003: 77). Note Alexander Walker (1808), cited by Subrahmanyam 2017: 276: 'The Hindoo religion is distinguished by its antiquity and long continuance. It has withstood every change of Government. It has remained unshaken by either violence or argument … In a long series of ages those who have been converted to the Christian or Mohammedan religions … will be found to be extremely few.'

[117] Talbot 2009 on conversion/origin stories about the Kyamkhanis. However, one preserves 'a telling indication that changing one's religion could lead to social rejection' (216).

[118] This boundary-crossing was typically driven by shared immanentist desiderata, but it also was enabled by common features of transcendentalist religiosity, for example, *bhakti* emphasising 'charity, ethical universalism, humility, social equality before God, techniques of spiritual upliftment and enlightenment' (Pinch 2006: 220).

[119] Eaton 1999.

pre-existing religious traditions it encountered: 'While the growth of Islam cannot be correlated with the concentration of Muslim political power, it does correlate with societies having little prior exposure to Brahmanic culture.'[120] It was the more heavily Brahmanised and Buddhist parts of South Asia that proved largely impervious to Islam, while these together with Islamised regions subsequently proved impervious to Christianity.[121]

Indeed, it was in part the redoubtable presence of Hinduism across South Asia that forced the Mughals to such extraordinary forms of innovation in conceiving the state policy towards religion described above.[122] Note how *conscious* Akbar's ideologue, Abu al-Fazl, was about the need to overcome religious boundaries. He reproved religious exclusivism as deriving from a faulty over-literal reading of scripture – and classed the Hindus as one such intransigent group alongside the monotheists: 'According to his [Akbar's] own perfect comprehension, he found the dispute between the Muhammadans, the Jews, and the Hindus [*hunud*] to have increased, and the overabundance of their denial toward each other['s faiths] has become clear.'[123]

Muslim power was not only evident on land. Muslim merchants came to dominate the trade flows that made the Indian Ocean the most lucrative zone of long-distance commerce in the world. The Arabic imaginaire travelled with them.[124] This generated a potential field of religious diplomacy in which commercial advantages accrued to ports and polities who could establish congenial relations with Muslim traders. And yet the religious imperviousness of trade-oriented city

[120] Eaton 2017: 380; 2019: 364–6, which includes the Jat pastoralists in the western Punjab. Eaton's (1993: 291–7) central explanation for the resilience of Buddhist and Brahmanic tradition rests on the importance of literacy as a relatively immutable form of revelation and authority structure but also refers in Weberian terms to lower or higher levels of rationalisation (173–4). Also Lieberman 2009: 671, 818.

[121] Eaton 1997: 243–71. Note Richards 1993: 284 (and compare 36): 'Islam remained a minority religion in every region of the subcontinent. The resilience of Hindu caste-defined society made further mass conversions unlikely.'

[122] See p. 365–6 above.

[123] Pye 2022: 917. However, Jews and Hindus are evoked here as 'a metonym for generalized religious difference.' Thanks to Blake Pye for discussion.

[124] On the Indian Ocean as Arabic cosmopolis: Ricci 2012.

states in the spice heartlands of the southwest is striking.[125] The pattern along the Malabar Coast and Jaffna was instead for Hindu rajas to retain ultimate sovereignty while the function of trade and naval protection was held somewhat at arms-length, being dominated by semi-independent Muslim groups such as the Mappilas.[126] If, in the port towns along other shores of the Indian Ocean, it was members of the political and economic elite who converted to Islam, Sebastian Prange notes that along the Malabar Coast it was rather confined to the lower orders.[127]

From 1498, the Portuguese also began impinging upon the affairs of coastal polities, and from the 1540s they were dispatching missionaries into the interior. Their activities produced a strong field of religious diplomacy by virtue of the way in which imperial and ecclesiastical objectives were so unusually intertwined.[128] A few petty rulers – or, more often, contenders for rule – in South Asia were drawn in, but these cases are confined to incidents where the short-term political exigencies were so strong as to compel a bargain with the Portuguese involving the promise of baptism. The case of the raja of the small kingdom of Tanur in the 1540s is illustrative: In order to gain Portuguese assistance to strengthen his position with regard to the Zamorin of Calicut, he proposed to be baptised in secret. This allowed him to continue wearing the sacred thread of the Brahmin amongst other signs of caste. When he was finally induced to travel to Goa for a public proclamation in 1548, he did so in the face of massive resistance on the part of his Nair relatives and vassals, and on his return he apostatised.[129]

There has, of course, been much discussion about how caste operated and how far it mattered before it was reconfigured under colonialism.[130] Nevertheless, when we come to consider the results of missionary efforts, it is instantly clear that, almost regardless of the

[125] The story of Cheraman Perumal's conversion to Islam is a myth of later construction: Prange 2018: 93, 106–7.

[126] Prange 2018: 159, 192 on the exclusion of Muslims from political office in kingdoms where the social order and expressions of political legitimacy were controlled by a Brahmin elite. Also Prange 2011; Wink 1997: 267–8.

[127] Prange 2018: 172.

[128] See p. 27.

[129] Rego 1947–1958, III: 308–9, 348; Strathern 2007a: 143–4; Županov 2005: 133–6.

[130] Dirks 2011. This has been fruitfully extended to Portuguese influence in areas under their control: Xavier 2016 and Guha 2013.

strategy deployed, they were primarily dictated by the logic of caste.[131] This amplified the obstacles to conversion for Brahmins and Kshatriya rulers, while generating a certain appeal among the lowest groups.[132] That the Malabar coast was already enmeshed in a powerful, if ever-dynamic, caste order is evident from the report of Alessandro Valignano in 1575, which describes in some detail this 'division by birth which they call *caste* in which they are so rooted that no argument can make them change'.[133] Indeed, this was the underlying structure preventing conversion.[134] To the extent that the conversion of the king entailed the repudiation of Hindu religious principles, it therefore implied the destruction of the tenets that held the entire social order in place.[135] As with the spread of Islam, the real missionary successes were to be found among those groups who existed at the lower reaches of the caste order, such as the fishing peoples of the coast, the Paravas and Mukkuvas – whether they felt merely unbound by a Brahmanical discourse of moral–social order or were deliberately evading it.[136] For higher castes, Christian conversion in particular entailed a loss of status.[137]

The Jesuits were forced to conclude that the only hope for success among the high castes was to present Christianity in a way that suggested it would assimilate into, rather than overturn, the status-purity system. This was the logic behind Roberto de Nobili's famous experiments in accommodation, in which he presented himself as a renouncer (*sannyāsi*), followed certain Brahmanical purity rules and advertised his erudition of the Vedas. Nobili had the advantage of operating in a rather plastic political environment, in which incomers were trying to establish themselves as legitimate rulers with the help of competing varieties of 'holy men'. Yet the stall he arrayed so carefully

[131] Also Frykenberg and Low 2003.
[132] Malabar Coast: Strathern 2007a: 91–4.
[133] Wicki 1948–1988, X: 180–1. Prange 2018: 167 notes that the Namputiri Brahmins of the region instituted 'a system of caste restrictions that was the most severe in all of medieval India'.
[134] The Augustinian friar Agostinho de Azevedo: 'The greatest impediment there is in the conversion of the Gentiles is the superstition that they maintain in their castes' (late 1580s–1590s, cited Subrahmanyam 2017: 95).
[135] The Raja of Cochin in 1514 simply claimed that his people would not suffer his conversion. Rego 1947–1958, vol. 1: 229.
[136] Strathern 2007a: 92–4; Prange 2018: 169
[137] Strathern 2007a: 93; Chakravarti 2018: 256.

and sensitively within this lively religious marketplace failed to draw any rulers towards the purchase of a lasting baptism. Tirumangala Nayaka, a dispossessed ruler of Sendamangalam, was baptised on Christmas day of 1625, but little came of it once his chances of recovering his kingdom revived.[138] It is not surprising that it was among the Maravars of the less Brahmanised dry-zone region of Southern Tamilnadu, as described by Susan Bayly, that Christianity found royal patronage and elite conversions – if no lasting ruler conversion. The religiosity of many groups in this region, with their fierce, local deities, probably remained in essentially immanentist mode.[139] Certainly, the thaumaturgic charisma generated by missionaries such as the Jesuit João de Britto exerted an undoubted appeal. Working in the Ramnad kingdom, Britto attracted the attention of the Poligar (feudal chief) of Siruvalli, Tadaiya Tevar.[140] In an entirely typical case of healing magic, once Tadaiya fell ill with a serious disease in 1692 he was prompted to experiment with Christian ritual and was cured after the recitation of the Creed. It was, of course, a Brahmin who reacted, proceeding in anger to the Cetupati, or ruler of Ramnad, and complaining of a threat to the religion. The Cetupati, guardian of the temple of Rama, moved against de Britto ('that man who in so short a time had by his magic enticed so many followers') and had him beheaded and impaled.[141]

This anecdote suggests, of course, some sort of connection between the status of Brahmins and the great failure of Christian missions. Indeed, the Brahmins' imperviousness to the appeal of Christianity was a standard feature of missionary reports. In terms of their inherited religious taxonomy, Europeans identified Hindus as 'gentiles', who were as a class assumed to be a softer target for conversion than Muslims or Jews. But missionaries quickly came to see Brahmins as comparable to the latter groups in their intransigence nonetheless, while Valignano lamented that they were more of an obstacle even than Chinese mandarins or Buddhist monks.[142] At the very start of the

[138] Županov 1999: 192.
[139] Bayly 2004 describes a profoundly immanentist religious landscape: 'What counted was the power or sacred energy of the gods and cult figures' (163, 395–6).
[140] Saulière 1947: 411–23; Mosse 2012: 36–7; Bayly 2004: 185.
[141] Saulière 1947: 423 (but note the canonisation impetus here).
[142] Xavier 2011: 256; Chakravarti 2018: 106; Rubiés 2000: 320.

Jesuit encounter with Hinduism, Francis Xavier was quickly disabused. Writing from the Comorin Coast in 1543, he identified the Brahmins as his principal opponents: 'If it were not for the opposition of the Brahmins, we should have them all embracing the religion of Jesus Christ.'[143] In Goa, under the coercive machinery and incentive structures of a Counter-Reformation state, Brahmin communities did come to convert.[144] Notably, where this happened, it necessitated finding other ways to preserve their sense of exalted lineage.[145] But, in areas outside the authority of the *Estado da India*, the particular unwillingness of Brahmins to countenance conversion was rarely overcome.[146]

It was inevitable that some Jesuits would conclude that they had little option but to mimic the Brahmins in themselves, developing radical new forms of cultural dialogue that would stretch their own understandings of what Christianity was. Accommodation may have had roots in some of the founding impulses of the Jesuits, but it was also forced on them by sheer lack of success.[147] Although many Jesuits were prone to attacking such obdurate pagan opponents – evidently servants of the devil – in the strongest terms, underlying this was also the sense that they were somehow encountering their own equivalents. This was an intelligentsia whose status rested in some measure upon their learning, their relation to scripture (they had teachings to impart and not just rituals to officiate), and whose 'virtues and ethos' were in one sense familiar.[148] When the impulse was to reprehend rather than to imitate them, this meant that it was natural to deploy the same anti-clerical tropes to which Catholic religious orders were themselves subject in Europe.[149] (As Chapter 4 showed, the principal

[143] Xavier, 31 December 1543, in Coleridge 1872: 159. Brahmin antagonism to Nobili: Županov 1999: 179. Guha 2010: 510.

[144] To repeat (see p. 363 above): Transcendentalist intransigence is liable to be worn down in the context of imperial subordination. Nevertheless, on the stubborn resistance attributed to the Brahmins in Goa: Chakravarti 2018: 183–6; Xavier 2007: 273; Xavier 2011: 256; O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008: 390.

[145] Xavier 2022.

[146] Chakravarti 2018: 262 on Baltasar da Costa's depiction (1640s) of Madurai Brahmins as 'implacably obstinate'. Of course, accommodationist techniques did procure some Brahmin converts. Aranha 2014: 301 on Brahmin converts in the 'pretercolonial' space of Bijāpur.

[147] Rubiés 2001: 227; Xavier and Županov 2015: 139, 143, 151.

[148] Xavier and Županov 2015: 131–2, 146–8, 154–5.

[149] Chakravarti 2018: 97.

transcendentalist clerisy in Japan, the sangha, were treated in exactly the same way.)

The Nobili approach was to exploit the fact that the Brahmin class as a whole was defined by orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy – 'these people follow one common way of life but many religions', as he put it – in order to deny its religious qualities.[150] His far less learned and storied rival, Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso, however, was not mistaken in arguing that the Brahmin's role could only be understood as part of an overarching system founded upon religious claims and practices.[151] Indeed the reference in his treatise of 1616 to the '*maquina do Bramanismo*' – the machine, fabrication, system of Brahmanism – was probably the earliest use of that term.[152] Lastly, and fundamentally, Jesuits came to realise that this was a system that held rulers in its grip.[153] The moral authority that Brahmins might wield in royal courts and more broadly was noted by an exasperated Jesuit, Antonio Rubino, in his 1608 account of the rump court of Vijayanagara at Chandragiri.[154]

In bald summary, the progress of Muslim rule across South Asia was the result of conquest rather than local ruler conversion, and it did not result in wholesale conversions of Hindus (except where Brahmanism and other more transcendentalist movements were not yet dominant) – despite the massive status of Persianate culture and an array of accommodative tendencies. In those areas where Hindu rajas remained for parts of the early modern period, rulers and Brahmins alike were equally impervious to Christianity. The brief comments above can only be suggestive, of course, as to why that should be. It bears repeating that a proper analysis (of the kind undertaken in the case study chapters) drawing, of course, on South Asian language sources would require far more case-specific contextualisation. These might include

[150] Sweetman 2003: 62.

[151] Rubiés 2000: 338; Subrahmanyam 2017: 121–2 on Rogerius.

[152] Fernandes 1973: 3, and see discussion in Sweetman 2003: 63; Županov 1999: 142; Xavier and Županov 2015: 119–20; Trento 2018: 95–6. Fernandes's informants included Brahmins who were disgruntled with Nobili.

[153] Županov 1999: 191.

[154] Rubiés 2001: 49–53; Xavier and Županov 2015: 144. Francis Xavier to the Society, 15 January 1544, Xavier and Valignano 1899, I: 288, had described Brahmins as 'sustaining all of heathendom'. See Prange 2018: 167, on Brahmins as 'the fount of political power', albeit in the unusual situation of Kerala where Nairs had intermarried with Brahmins.

the different schools or types of Brahmins involved, the significance of non-Brahmanical virtuosi or non-Brahmanical movements such as *bhakti*, the relevance of Advaita Vedānta monism, the geography and flux of caste integration, various developing and divergent discourses of sacral authority and so on.[155] Indeed, at a more abstract level, it would be fruitful to consider recent scholarly explorations of South Asian early modernity – the rise of newly centralised states, paper bureaucracy, increasing social mobility, monetisation and commercialisation, an emergent public sphere, the scribalisation of Brahmins – and the implications of these for the relationship between religion and political authority.[156]

To refer to the analysis of Hinduism earlier in this book, clearly there are many transcendentalist features of the religious environment in which missionaries operated that could be brought into the analysis – including non-Brahmanic figures such as Śaivite *paṇṭārams*, *bhakti* teachers, even Sufi saints.[157] But these brief notes about how missionaries attempted to make sense of their failure to convert rulers suggest that in many instances such intransigence was connected to a set of interlocking relationships between rajas, Brahmins and the system of purity hierarchy that exalted them both.[158] In most of the royal courts they worked in, missionaries realised that Brahmins were seen as foundational to the system of social order and to the system of political order alike. They were integrated into the more banausic work of the state as scribes and advisors as well as officiants. They were frustrating

[155] On the universalist-monist perspective (as in Neoplatonism) both subverting and incorporating aspects of transcendentalism: Gommans 2020: 7; Fisher 2017: 40; Rubiés 2020: 511; Minkowski 2011.

[156] These implications may include a more pan-Indic sense of Brahmanical status and a more coherent awareness of the commonality of Hindu traditions, the growing authority of Benares, the development of a more conservative Brahmanic voice among Maratha Brahmins of the late seventeenth century, the tension between popular devotionalism and courtly Brahmanical orthodoxy. O'Hanlon 2013: 777–9; O'Hanlon and Washbrook 2011; O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008; Fisher 2017; Stoker 2016.

[157] Nobili's successor in the Madurai mission, Baltasar da Costa, saw the Śaivite *paṇṭāram* (priest serving the middle and lower castes) as a more socially significant figure for emulation than the Brahmin: Chakravarti 2014. Rao and Subrahmanyam 2012 emphasise the diminished status of Brahmins and the *varna*-based social order in general at the Nayaka courts of Madurai and Tanjavur.

[158] Brahmin qualms about pollution incurred by serving *yavana* rulers in the sixteenth century: Minkowski 2014.

intellectual opponents, ready to do battle atop their own corpus of scripture, with their own long traditions of reflection on matters of theism and soteriology to draw upon. They were literati, ascetics, salvific virtuosi (transcendentalist clerisy); they were also the very essence of pagan idolatry (immanentist priests). No wonder Jesuits both castigated and mimicked them. No wonder they failed.

East Asia

Across all sectors of society, and in all contexts from the most local of cults to the rites of the imperial court, the immanentist qualities of religious life were pervasive in China. But in terms of the paradigm of legitimate rulership, Confucianism (*sensu lato*) was largely dominant. Chapter 9 explored at some length the paradoxes involved in conceptualising it in terms of our theoretical equipment. While lacking a concept of otherworldly salvation, the Confucian tradition was functionally transcendentalist in certain ways: It established a set of universal ethical principles and a quest for ethical perfection; it was based on a canon of revered texts, guarded and interpreted by a literati; it had some capacity to call rulers to account by appealing to abstract higher principles.

It was this common ground that would allow Matteo Ricci, in one of the major flourishes of Jesuit accommodationist thinking at the end of the sixteenth century, to argue that Christianity was in fact 'orthodox' (*zheng*) in Confucian terms, both traditions expressing a conviction in a morally positive universe enjoining self-cultivation as well as ritual propriety.[159] Confucianism was far from the only intellectual product of China's Axial Age, and at least two further strands with enduring significance were identified in the previous chapter: the Mohist–Daoist–millenarian strand and the Qin assertion of divinised kingship. Michael Puett's observation that these three modes continued to interweave throughout subsequent centuries has great analytical power.[160] Of course, even this is to greatly downplay the pluralism of the

[159] Hosne 2016; 234. Buddhism, as a rival soteriology, however, was heterodox.
[160] Puett 2017: 101–2. For example, the extraordinarily early development of meritocratic bureaucracy may owe something to the ethical-transcendentalist strain as manifest in the spiritual meritocracy of the Daoists.

tradition of classical learning that has become known as Confucianism, let alone other traditions such as Legalism.[161]

And then Buddhism arrived as an Indic transcendentalism, no doubt finding a niche precisely because of its salvific raison d'être. By the Sui (581–618 CE) and then Tang (618–907) dynasties, it had not only acquired a strong influence at the imperial level, and its monasteries become major landholders, but it had 'permeated all sectors of Chinese society' and taken on a deeply localised and popularising character.[162] Buddhism joined with the existing traditions in intensive forms of mutual borrowing-cum-rivalry, which Prasenjit Duara refers to as 'dialogical transcendence', and which ensured that none of the constituent elements stayed still in terms of form and function.[163] Under the combined pressure of both state-sanctioned Confucianism and popular immanentism, for example, the transcendentalist dimensions to both Buddhism and Daoism were frequently submerged as they took on ceremonial and thaumaturgical functions.[164]

The essentially immanentist practices of life at a popular level, oriented towards the cultivation of countless and often capricious metapersons, continued as strongly as ever.[165] The attempts to integrate these beings into a state-manufactured hierarchy were only ever partially successful, with much of Chinese religious life operating as 'ritual autarky'.[166] Popular religion did however share much ground with the 'official religion' of the state, in which the whole administrative hierarchy reaching down even to household heads was simultaneously a liturgical structure.[167] At each level, the appropriate rites were mandated, and at the apex, of course, resided the emperor and his unique relationship with Heaven. In certain ways, this edifice of cosmic

[161] Nylan 2001: 54.
[162] Lieberman 2009: 500; Paramore 2016a: 24. Note also the conversion to Buddhism of Emperor Wu of the Liang (r. 502–549): Palumbo 2015.
[163] Duara 2015. See, for example, 127, on the diverse forms taken by Daoism.
[164] Hence Buddhism could be pushed into certain niches such as funeral supervision – analogous to how Brahmanism was immanentised and restricted in Theravada regions. Conversely, transcendentalism did seep through into popular religion in China through the incorporation of an ethical interpretation of afterlife, with an elaboration of heavens and hells.
[165] Duara 2015: 171; Feuchtwang 2001.
[166] Dean 2017. Compare Strathern 2019: 124–31 on imperial consolidation of religion in immanentist settings.
[167] Shek 2004; Taylor 2004.

kingship bears analogy with imperial cults developing in many immanentist settings.

But this official state cult was rooted in a Confucian canon.[168] More importantly, Confucian learning provided the pre-eminent discourse of legitimacy and teleocracy for the imperial court. Its societal relevance expanded through Neo-Confucianism, its norms and values were also gradually diffused across many levels of society, as a kind of gradual disciplinary revolution from at least the Song (960–1279) onwards.[169] The various 'Axial' strengths of Confucianism may be why it was ultimately able to resist the force of soteriological transcendentalism. As Max Deeg puts it:

> One could say that the highly idealized concepts of Heaven (*tian* 天) of the empire (*tianxia*) and the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) prevented the emergence of a religious transcendental realm like Augustine's *Civitas Dei* … Thus … no religious group could successfully challenge the ideological claim of power of the state represented by the emperor.[170]

Therefore, a certain critical distance between elite culture and Buddhism was never quite closed; the conceptualisation of state power remained distinct. Indeed, Buddhism could be regarded with deep suspicion, its very otherworldliness (and indeed foreignness) held against it, and its monastic orders subject to severe bouts of repression or at least strict supervision by the Confucian bureaucracy.[171] The relationship with both salvationism and immanentism remained full of flux and tension. This is clear not only in the state's regular tussles with the social power of monastic Buddhism but also in its periodic vulnerability to massive popular uprisings animated by millenarian movements drawing on coalescing Buddhist, Daoist and immanentist forms of supernatural utopianism.[172] Indeed, Confucianism's embrace of a largely de facto immanentist ontology had come at a cost: It meant that the state had, in a sense, ceded the social power of soteriology to rebels and the popular sphere, which was therefore deployed by anti-state movements up to and including the communist revolution.[173]

[168] Note this does not make it identifiable as 'Confucianism' per se. Taylor 2004: 122.
[169] Lieberman 2009: 501, 509–13.
[170] Deeg 2015: 27.
[171] Palumbo 2015: 100; 2017; Deeg 2015: 274.
[172] Duara 2015: 170–3.
[173] The communist revolution was of course neither transcendentalist nor soteriological in the strict sense deployed throughout this book, but it nonetheless resembles earlier supernatural utopianist movements – such as the

Nor could it rest secure in its control of the social power of immanentism, evident in the way popular movements focussed on accessing supernatural power (*ling*).[174] For all that, not just in China but across East Asia, once a Confucian worldview was established at an elite level, it proved remarkably resistant to being dislodged. Indeed, its appeal as an instrument of governmentality and social discipline remained intact up to the twentieth century. By the time of the arrival of European missionaries, the state was long used to managing the religious field, as a synthesis between interacting Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist and popular traditions, in which a great deal of pluralism and flexibility was preserved while potential threats to public order and morality were carefully watched.[175]

That no Chinese emperor converted to monotheism is not exactly something that requires special explanation, however. The emperor's ethical qualities as well as ritual relations with Heaven were what the flourishing of the realm depended upon. All Chinese imperial dynasties came to see themselves as residing at the heart of a superordinate centre of human accomplishment – both in terms of sheer political might and in terms of ethics, aesthetics, religiosity and civility. It was not until the late-nineteenth century that this found any significant challenge.

Where we might expect openings for more disruptive sensibilities to become manifest is in those moments of breakdown and re-conquest that occurred between dynastic regimes. During the reign of the last Ming emperor, Chongzhen (1628–1644), 'in a society shaken by oppression, rebellion, invasions and natural disasters', as Hsia puts it, 'the number of converts rose from 13,000 to 70,000, a rate of increase unsurpassed in the subsequent history of Catholicism in China'.[176] There were a smattering of elite conversions, too, including Zhu Yishou, the Duke of Ningyang.[177] But it was only once Beijing was taken by the Manchus in 1644, in the exceptional circumstances faced by a massively reduced and beleaguered rump Southern Ming court, that European religious diplomacy could exert any serious traction. Under Zhu Youlang, the Yongli Emperor (b. 1623, r. 1646–1662), there was a remarkable conversion movement to

Taiping rebellion and the redemptive societies discussed by Duara 2015 – in important ways.

[174] Dean 2017. *Ling* is equivalent to *mana*.

[175] Compare Hsu 2005: 463, and by 1700: Laamann 2015: 93.

[176] Hsia 2015: 66. [177] Hsia 2015.

Catholicism among officials and members of the imperial family. Fundamentally, this must be associated with the perceived capacity of Jesuit connections to yield European gunpowder weapons, military expertise and diplomatic opportunities, amongst a court mounting a rearguard defence against the Qing cataclysm and riven by internal factionalism.[178] The key go-between with the Portuguese in Macao was a Catholic eunuch, Achilles Pang Tiangshou. Indeed, three hundred Portuguese and Christian troops from Macao helped win a rare victory at Guilin in 1647.[179] But, it is worth pausing on this curious case, for Yongli's need for supernatural assistance appears to have been no less keenly felt, bringing his deliberations within the second stage in the model of ruler conversion.

Attempting to regroup in Zhaoqing in 1648, several female members of the imperial family converted, including the Empress Dowager Wang, the widow of Emperor Tianqi, who was baptised as Helena.[180] When the emperor visited them the next day he found them kneeling before an image of the Holy Virgin; shortly afterwards five provinces returned to his obedience.[181] Yongli's wife Empress Wang (Anna) was among this growing Christian faction, and when she became pregnant, the Austrian Jesuit Andreas Wolfgang Köffler advised supplication of the Christian God for a son – who duly arrived.[182] Yongli was delighted and asked the Jesuit to interpret the meaning of the time of his heir's arrival. Köffler, adopting the terms of Chinese astrology, predicted that the child heralded the rebirth of his empire and would shine like a sun over all of China. Still, the emperor hesitated to allow his baptism. But when the baby fell seriously ill, the Jesuit attributed it to the anger of the Christian God – had he not awarded the Yongli five provinces, and how had he been repaid? The emperor must have been perturbed, for he granted the baptism of his son – of course he was named Constantine – who recovered his

[178] Sun and Deng 2011; Ying-Ki 1925. [179] Hsia 2015: 77.

[180] Standaert, ed. 2001: 440. Thanks to Susumu Akune for alerting me to this event. These conversions are attested in Chinese sources too; see also Struve 1984: 143, fn. 17; Ying-Ki 1925; Sun and Deng 2011.

[181] Boym 1654: 59. Chabrié 1933: 79 largely follows Boym, but differs in details, drawing on other sources. The latter are discussed in Pelliott 1934, and see also Petrolini et al. 2022: 60–72.

[182] Boym 1654: 61–3. Previously, Yongli had blamed God when a daughter had died.

health.[183] Christianity had reached into the heart of the imperial dynasty, albeit at the moment of its demise, and those old immanentist themes of healing and victory had done their work.[184] Yet the essential logic here is explicable in terms of the rather traditional concept of a Heaven that rewards or punishes rulers through military–political outcomes – albeit a Heaven more personal and agentive than many literati envisaged. Most important: The whole question of legitimacy vis-à-vis the politically relevant population had been rendered essentially redundant, and all that was left were some deeply existential imperatives.

Meanwhile, the Jesuit astronomer Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), who was left behind in Beijing, became a favourite of the first Qing emperor to rule China, Shunzhi (1644–1661). Great hopes for the emperor's baptism rose among the missionaries as a result.[185] Indeed, Jesuits such as Schall had long been granted favour for their scientific, astronomical, mathematical skills – the same strategy we saw deployed by the Jesuits in Ayutthaya.[186] Schall was now dealing with a Manchu ruling elite still feeling their way in ideological and governmental terms, and with a political theology that looked north and west, rather than with a 'Confucian emperor'. However, the young emperor turned to Chan Buddhism instead without having taken this step.[187] Among the literati more generally, the 1660s and 1670s have been described as a time of unusual intellectual openness in which the gap between the ideal and the real was too great for some to bear, turning from Confucianism to Buddhism and a few even to Christianity.[188] The next emperor, Kangxi (1661–1722), had little problem, as a Manchu ruler, patronising Christianity as one of many religions even as he began to play the part of a Confucian emperor, and

[183] Boym 1654: 63–6; Chabrié 1933: 80–1. Koffler had first gained the emperor's confidence with a bag of relics to help banish his fear of demons, and animal omens were interpreted on both sides to indicate the connection between Christianity and imminent success: Miazek-Męczyńska 2015: 23–6.

[184] There is no good evidence that Yongli himself was baptised, although Boym 1654: 59 insinuates that the prospect was likely.

[185] Wills 2001: 137–40; Brockey 2008. The Jesuit Fernão de Queyroz (1992: 463), claims that, 'though perfectly convinced of the falsity of his sect and of the truth of the law of Christ', he was dissuaded from baptism by 'political and human considerations', even at the extremity of his imminent death.

[186] Jami 2012.

[187] Witek 2016: 331.

[188] Wakeman 2005 wonders whether a brief Axial breakthrough was one result, with particular reference to the work of Gu Yanwu.

the close integration of Jesuits into his household was genuine. But when, in the 'Chinese Rites' controversies, Rome finally gave notice that it would no longer tolerate Jesuit acquiescence in the rites of ancestral reverence, it was clear that Christians would have to be brought to heel just as they had been in Japan. In a decree of 1706, Kangxi insisted that all missionaries would have to swear to follow the 'rules of Matteo Ricci' – that is, adhere to accommodation – and accept these rites in order to obtain permission to remain in China.[189] In 1720 he communicated to the missionaries that the presence of Christianity was ultimately 'of no consequence'; the state was governed by teachings of Confucius, which inculcated 'in the people the great duties of love for their superiors and ancestors'.[190]

More significant than such non-events at the highest level was the more concrete matter of conversions among the population at large. Just as in Japan – though in very different circumstances – Christian missionaries found that in time they could win over hundreds of thousands of neophytes, including some elite figures.[191] By the time of the Qing transition they could be found in 'most major cities, with Nanjing and the commercial centres of the Jiangnan taking the lead'.[192] Just as in Japan, Christianity's association with immanent power (especially healing and exorcism) was often to the fore here, as both an advantage and disadvantage.[193] Even when the faith was persecuted, it could survive and grow underground – in common with other popular salvationist movements in China to this day. Indeed, this conforms to something of a pattern that obtains across regions influenced by Confucianism and Mahayana Buddhism, namely, that while monotheism very rarely won enduring commitment of ruling figures, it did provoke movements at lower levels. These could reach sizeable numbers without ever threatening to become more than a distinct minority. By 1700, Eugene Menegon suggests 250,000 Christians at 0.17 per cent of the Qing Empire.[194]

[189] Brockey 2008: 185–91; Swen 2021: 110–40. Note that his edict of toleration of 1692 was influenced by Manchu advisors, while the 1706 decree was more in line with the wishes of local officials. Standaert, ed. 2001: 518.

[190] Standaert, ed. 2001: 503. During this period, several members of the imperial clan (in particular Sunu and his offspring) became Christian and were persecuted as part of the struggle for succession, but Manchu conversions continued: Laamann 2015: 99.

[191] Hsia 2009: 276. [192] Laamann 2015: 92. [193] Laamann 2015: 96.

[194] Menegon 2017: 311. Bays 2012: 32 suggests more than 150,000 by the 1690s.

Speculatively, this may be related to the way that Mahayana Buddhism operated within the combinatory religious field across East Asia. In China this meant that it shared ground with various other philosophical and religious schools that were maintained under the higher auspices of an imperial-Confucian vision of order. As Deeg puts it, Buddhism's conversion of China remained incomplete; it failed to become the definitive state religion over the long term.[195] Therefore, while Mahayana Buddhism may be considered 'established' in one sense of the term – forming an extensive network of institutions at the level of villages and towns as well as the capital, and influencing popular and elite culture in very significant ways – the matter of whether it was 'established' in terms of its relationship with state power is far less clear. For most of Chinese history, it did not constitute the hegemonic telos of the state, the ground of its legitimacy. One corollary of this is that on an institutional level, Mahayana Buddhism enjoyed considerable independence; another is that it flowered into many different and competing schools of interpretation and revelation, as expressed in both monastic and lay movements.[196] Perhaps all this has some relevance to another feature that missionaries explicitly noted about these regions: that the status of monks was more questionable than it was in Theravada societies.[197] We should not take Jesuit delight at Chinese anti-clericalism at face value; Buddhism had undergone something of revival in the late Ming Era before suffering a loss of elite traction under the Qing.[198] But it is notable that Matteo Ricci's success among certain mandarins was associated with their mutual desire to suppress Buddhism (compare the Japanese unifiers) and the general combinatory approach to religious traditions.[199] A highly abstract summation would be: The fact that the state conceded salvationism and supernatural utopianism to the non-state arena meant both an opening for Christianity and its ultimate subordination.

A similar pattern may be seen in Vietnam. Indeed the kingdoms of Đàng Ngoài (Tonkin) and Đàng Trong (Cochinchina) were described by seventeenth-century Catholic observers as one of the most productive arenas of missionary activity in the world.[200] This was in part a

[195] Deeg 2015: 273–4; Taylor 2004; Shek 2004. [196] Forest 1998, III: 442.
[197] Pascal 2016: 13. Queyroz 1992: 140.
[198] Zhang 2020 on the late Ming revival, while also noting that 'its weak and marginal position within the power structure was little improved' (197).
[199] Prieto 2017. [200] Alberts 2013b; Lieberman 2009: 403.

function of the tolerance and patronage that missionaries were able to enjoy in this politically fragmented landscape, which was in turn driven largely by the imperatives of religious diplomacy. Just as in sixteenth-century Japan, competing political centres scavenged for external sources of strength and routinely associated commercial and diplomatic advantages with the toleration of missionaries.[201] On a more general level, the highly eclectic, open and fluid field of religious practice of the Viet peoples – a 'complex patchworks of locally-inspired devotions overlaid with some shared beliefs and practices drawn from the Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian canons' – was surely germane.[202] These were not polities that were 'geared up' or consolidated in religious terms.[203] Crucially, the Buddhist clergy 'seemed relatively peripheral to the devotional life of much of the population'.[204] Yet Neo-Confucianism had had a profound impact on the educated classes and had helped to sharpen a sense of ethnic distinctiveness, and even cultural purity, against barbarian peoples.[205]

Therefore, if a certain Mahayana openness to Christianity is evident here, so too is the fact that this did not translate into the actual conversions of rulers, who were rather liable, ultimately, to identify the new cult as a species of subversion. Here too ruling elites came to assert Neo-Confucianism as a means of embedding authority and stability.[206] In 1662, Trịnh Tạc went so far as to forbid all books of Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity.[207] Therefore in parts of Vietnam, as in Japan and China, the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

[201] As Alberts (2018: 270) puts it: 'The two courts both came to see the advantages of opening up to foreigners as a source of trade, revenue, weaponry, and expertise' – and thus religious diplomacy followed. Also Tran 2018: 25.

[202] Alberts 2013a 74; Lieberman 2003: 403–4, 413; Forest 1998, III: 289–93.

[203] Alberts 2013a: 80. The Jesuit Pêro Marques reported that in both regions, 'The kings and monarchs have power only over the body of their vassals, and not their souls.'

[204] Alberts 2013a: 83–4. Missionaries noted the 'generally ambiguous reputation of Buddhist and Taoist clergy'.

[205] Of the reforms under the Lê Dynasty from 1428, Lieberman MS notes their 'ardently transformative, almost soteriological vision' with literati demands for social change blossoming 'into a movement which, despite its disinterest in otherworldly fates, resembled transcendentalist religion in its moral certitude and insistence on character transformation'.

[206] Whitmore 1984: 304.

[207] Alberts 2013a: 84. While Nguyen lords in the 1690s chose Chinese Chan Buddhism as the means of establishing 'a more uniform belief system over the existing mélange of local Buddhist and spirit beliefs'. Whitmore 2009: 13.

saw a newly trenchant commitment to Confucianism, and state wariness of Christianity translated into edicts against missionary activity.[208]

Maritime Southeast Asia and Islamisation

Southeast Asia presents us with a striking pattern. The mainland region (represented today by Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia) remained relatively impervious to monotheism, while much of the maritime region (Indonesia and Malaysia) was steadily converted to Islam.[209] In the first instance, this must reflect a geopolitical and even commercial logic, as is observed below. But might it also be connected to the fact that the mainland societies had already embarked on establishing Theravada Buddhism before Islamic (and Christian) influence reached its peak – a process without parallel in the maritime region?

Insofar as parts of Maritime Southeast Asia had already played host to Hindu and Mahayana/Vajrayana Buddhist influences, we might want to consider this as evidence weakening our sense of the capacity of these traditions to resist monotheistic ruler conversion. This instinct has merit – but only up to a point, as there are several considerations that allow us to see the matter in a different light; these have been explored elsewhere and are only briefly summarised here.[210] It is clear that the whole region was swept into a powerful current of religious diplomacy, as port cities sought to attract the lucrative and Muslim-dominated commerce with the Indian Ocean and China.[211] But this was an unusually consequential dynamic, for a major upswing in seaborne trade from the fifteenth century created a new conjuncture of maritime-oriented political economy.[212] It is therefore crucial to note that many of these coastal towns had sprung up relatively

[208] Tran 2018: 33–5. In Japan, where the exposure to Christianity began earlier, so too did the anti-Christian and pro-Confucian response.

[209] The Christianisation of the Philippines is set to one side here because it took place under the paradigm of conquest, as in the Americas. The Islamisation of certain areas, however, beginning before 1570s, would be relevant.

[210] Strathern 2013; 2007b.

[211] See p. 28; Beaujard 2019: 267–8, 498. Wade 2010 on the rise of Muslim powers in India and their role in Chinese seaborne expansion.

[212] Reid 1993a.

recently, with some explicitly referring to the foreign origins of their founders.[213] In such cases, we may see the rise of Islam less in terms of ruler conversion and more as a function of the settlement of powerful newcomers: the collapse of old states and the rise of new ones seeking alternative means of both power and legitimation.

Moreover, the image of the peaceful conversion of the region obscures the way that these ascendant states themselves used military force to advance their faith at times, as in the case of the king of Aceh who waged war against the king of the Bataks after he had refused to convert.[214] Certainly, conversion to Islam seems to have become a dimension of acknowledging vassalage to Melaka, as in the case of Pahang and Kedah.[215] Indeed, in the interior of Java, the empire of Majapahit was not converted as such; rather it crumbled as the vibrant new Muslim cities of the Pesisir such as Demak, Gresik and Surabaya came to power. The rulers of these small-scale and quintessentially cosmopolitan city-states did not have the matter of their legitimacy among dispersed elites and large agrarian populations to consider but could respond nimbly to the ideological as well as commercial needs of the conjuncture. In other words, the relevant 'political community' could and did shift quite quickly: It was the merchant classes, and their seaborne connections, who could guarantee whether a port-city flourished or died.[216]

Most important, however, is the question of characterising how deeply the influence of Indic religious culture had penetrated the different areas of the archipelago; how influential it was beyond the court; how firmly transcendentalist elements were to the fore; and, most important, how 'established' these traditions were in social and political terms at the point at which Islam arrived.[217] These are vast questions indeed, and for many regions we lack the evidentiary basis on which to construct a robust answer. The archaeological record does seem to indicate a loss of vitality of Buddhism before the coming of

[213] Wain 2017; Feener 2023: 203–5. [214] Reid 1993b: 92–3.
[215] Graaf 1977: 126.
[216] Beaujard 2019: 501. The sensibilities of upstream communities also mattered, however: Hall 2001.
[217] Reid 1993a: 142; Casparis and Mabbett 1999: 322. Much scholarship has emphasised the role of indigenous immanentism in structuring the reception of Indic transcendentalism.

Islam.[218] Perhaps fourteenth-century climatic and tectonic developments played their role in accentuating political and cultural disruption.[219] There is one dimension of limited Indianisation that is potentially most significant, and that is the fact that nowhere was a fully fledged caste system holding up a dominant Brahmin caste transplanted.[220] Given the role that this seems to have played as a major obstacle to elite conversions in South Asia, suggested above, this is of obvious importance.[221] Even in Bali, for example, where a form of Hindu-influenced religion held out enduringly against Islamisation, the caste system operated in a somewhat different way. Meanwhile, the extent to which Buddhism had moved from a phenomenon of elite patronage and trans-regional connections to becoming a constituent feature of life for a broader domestic population, remains rather obscure.[222]

Some of the earliest evidence of Islamisation comes from northern Sumatra, with evidence of a Muslim Sultan of Pasai from 1297.[223] And this region has fewer obvious signs of Indic religious culture than we see elsewhere in the archipelago.[224] Indeed, if we outline an extremely approximate geography of Indianisation, it would seem that classic ruler conversions to Islam were more likely to play a decisive role in

[218] Casparis and Mabbett 1999: 321: 'There are few, if any Buddhist remains and this religion seems to have faded away even before the Islamisation of Java.'

[219] Reid 2015b: 53–6, also reflecting on disease. The tsunami of 1394 (Daly et al. 2019; Reid 2015a: 72–4) may have removed much of the Hindu–Buddhist legacy and made settlement in this region discontinuous. This may be related to the notably Islamised version of exemplary Malay culture that Aceh subsequently exported.

[220] Casparis and Mabbett 1999: 305: 'The use of the term "Hinduism" may be misleading because one of its most important features, the caste system, existed only in theory.'

[221] Lieberman 2009: 819; Woodward 1989: 242.

[222] That is, how far it had moved from a 'civilizational' to a 'cultural' phenomenon (Reynolds and Hallisey 1989; see below).

[223] Feener et al. 2021; Feener 2011; Lambourn 2004; Drewes 1968: 447.

[224] Hadi 2004: 237; Feener et al. 2021: 30–1; Miksic 2010: 24. However, according to Hall 2001 the fifteenth-century chronicle of Pasai, *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, has some evidence of pre-Islamic tradition, with immanentist elements and divinised kingship strongly to the fore (e.g., 208), and a few clues of Hindu–Buddhist legacies. Thanks to Jessica Rahardjo and Michael Feener for discussion.

areas where it was less advanced.[225] Indic religious culture seems to have penetrated most deeply in Southern Sumatra, Java and Bali: We have seen that it was in Java that the military collapse of the old regional power of Majapahit and the rise of the new towns of the Pesisir was significant, while Bali resisted Islam altogether in this period.[226] Indeed, in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Bali had been fortified by the arrival of Brahmins and nobles displaced by the disintegration of Majapahit. In Sulawesi, by contrast, where Indianisation appears to have been much weaker, the two co-rulers of the most important kingdom on the island converted to Islam in 1605.[227] Moreover, wherever Islam was successful in areas with more deeply embedded Indic traditions, it had to enter into particularly emphatic forms of syncretism and co-habitation.[228] In short, while the case of archipelagic Southeast Asia reminds us that transcendentalist traditions can indeed become a vital element of high culture in a region only to be succeeded in turn by a different form of transcendentalism, the context in which this occurred in this instance remains decidedly murky. What clues we do get suggest that some of the 'moving parts' outlined earlier in this chapter – how 'established' the pre-existing traditions are, the composition of the relevant political community and so on – may help to explain the reasons for the relative openness to Islam in this region. Certainly, the Muslim-dominated trade conjuncture had very different consequences for the framing of political authority among the port cities of Southeast Asia than it did among those of the South Asian littoral.

Mainland Southeast Asia and the Theravada World

Archipelagic Southeast Asia stands in marked contrast to the Theravada societies of the mainland region and Sri Lanka where the lure of monotheist mercantilists was resisted over the long term. Some

[225] Strathern 2013: 36. This partly depends on how we characterise the conversion of Melaka, discussed in Strathern 2013 and closely linked to the pull of Chinese Muslim religious diplomacy.

[226] On the importance of Sumatra and Java as Buddhist centres in the period up to the thirteenth century, see Miksic 2010. On a 1365 text describing the ruler of Majapahit as 'Shiva and Buddha, embodied in both the material and immaterial': Reid 2015b: 44.

[227] Gibson 2007: 45–9. [228] Ricklefs 2006.

scholars prefer not to use the term 'Theravada' at all, mindful of the contested nature of its emic usage by particular monastic lineages prior to the nineteenth century (the terminological debates here are comparable to that over Hinduism).[229] Nevertheless, the term remains useful as an etic category, allowing us to capture both a number of fundamental common features and a subjective sense of shared tradition.[230] The Theravada tradition crystallised in the Mahāvihāra monastery in Sri Lanka in the third to fifth centuries CE.[231] What resulted was a particularly transcendentalised version of Buddhism: a reformist movement that gained its authority through a focus on textual, doctrinal, ethical and soteriological purity.[232] At the level of doctrine, it presented a bulwark against certain processes of immanentisation: It was hardened in particular against the tendency towards theism as a soteriological vehicle and the transformation of Buddha himself into a deity. It developed strong discourses of heresy, of false and wicked doctrines, to describe these and other malformations of the truth it expounded.

Such 'offensive' qualities were perhaps stimulated by its origins in the intense rivalry between the Mahāvihāra and the other two main monastic orders on the island, the Abhayagiri and Jetavana Vihāras, which tended to a more open engagement with Tantric and Mahayana currents. By no means did the Mahāvihāra have the upper hand over the first millennium. Tilman Frasch refers to a particularly acute crisis under King Mahāsena (r. 275–301):

> The imminent destruction and eventual survival of their monastery must have welded the Mahāvihārins together and reinforced their belief in their own righteousness and exclusiveness. Their obstinacy in keeping separate from the other fraternities, which also meant carrying on as a minority, their 'scripturalist' insistence on a defined set of texts that was not to be altered, and their resorting to an artificial language incomprehensible to outsiders bear all the hallmarks of a fundamentalist movement. In addition to this, the

[229] Skilling et al. 2012.

[230] Or perhaps 'Pali oriented Buddhism'; the 'Pali cosmopolis' is a slightly different concept. See *UP* 73, and Gornall 2020: 15, en. 3; Gornall and Henry 2017; Frasch 2017.

[231] Frasch 2017: 69.

[232] Collins 1990: 102 on contemporary perceptions of Theravada tradition as a text-oriented reformist movement.

Mahāvihārins displayed a certain missionary zeal through attempts to disseminate the 'canonized' version of the scriptures.[233]

Much in the manner of what would happen to the post-Constantine Christian church in the fourth-century-CE Roman Empire, what was set in motion was a process of canonisation – the exaltation of the very idea of a canon, according to Steven Collins – combined with a developing mutual constitution with state power.[234] While Ashoka was a major patron of Buddhism and a paradigmatic sacred king for subsequent Buddhist dynasties, Anuradhapura in north-central Sri Lanka became the first state to found its ideological raison d'être upon Buddhism.[235] Theravada Buddhism came to set up a pre-eminent (rather than exclusivist) relationship with monarchy: Other traditions were not denied but firmly encompassed within a hegemonic framework. This vision strongly emphasised the legitimacy (as opposed to only the status) of the monarch, and linked the fortunes of kings and subjects – in both this life and subsequent lives – to their preservation of the dhamma and sangha. As part of a longer process of coalescence, under the reign of Parākramabāhu I (1153–1186), who achieved political mastery of the whole island, other *nikayas* were dissolved as the Mahāvihāra became the sole order. In this way, the tradition also presented an ideal image, at least, of monastic cohesion and discipline, which was in turn associated with soteriological power.[236] If other kinds of internal disunity resurfaced, it is very significant that from this point on, there would be no great theological differences pluralising the Buddhist realm as we see in Mahayana regions. It is perhaps no surprise that the twelfth to thirteenth centuries also saw some further dimensions of reformism, as Alastair Gornall has pointed out, characterised by an acute consciousness of the degeneration of the *dhamma*, a desire to return to the original meanings of the teachings of the Buddha through new scholarly techniques, and the development of new devotional means of attaining salvation that might suit a lay community.[237]

[233] Frasch 2017: 70. [234] Collins 1990.

[235] Gombrich 1984: 183. Skilling 2007: 183 argues that Theravada Buddhism was not a 'state religion' in Ayutthaya, but this rests on a rather specific definition of that term.

[236] Schonthal 2021: 297.

[237] Gornall 2020: 5, passim, on reform or 'purification' (*visuddhi*). In one thirteenth-century text, decline is articulated in terms that amount to a shift from transcendentalism to immanentism (130–1).

While Lankan society remained religiously plural and open in many important ways, it is also evident that a growing 'offensiveness' among certain Hindu traditions was met with a Buddhist reaction.[238] By this point, Buddhism had spread its roots into Lankan society at large, thus representing the culmination of a shift from what Reynolds and Hallisey refer to as a civilisational stage of Buddhism (large, rather autonomous monastic centres engaging with royal centres but looking outward to a broader pan-Asian Buddhist ecumene) to a cultural phase (acculturated to local conditions, spreading deeper roots among society at large, and increasingly under the supervision of local states).[239] Certainly, in Sri Lanka, it would seem that Buddhism had come to shape the lives of ordinary people across the island far from royal centres.[240]

Scholars are now rethinking the flows of influence between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, pointing out how much work remains to be done and complicating any simple image of the export of a unified package from Lanka to the region.[241] Yet ultimately a form of Buddhism based on the Pali canon and the Mahāvihāran worldview, with monastic lineages asserting their purity by claiming Lankan origins, did come to dominate mainland societies between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. This superseded the mélange of Hindu and Buddhist religious influences that had characterised the region hitherto (just as they had characterised the parts of maritime Southeast Asia referred to above).[242] There may have been a Buddhist millennial conjuncture imparting a degree of soteriological urgency to this process, as ruling elites became conscious of the predicted five-thousand-year decline of the Buddhist dispensation (*sāsana*) and the need to take all opportunities to generate merit in the meantime – and perhaps intent on corralling the social energy of a popular

[238] See Gornall 2020: 179, and see 172 on the Pali *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* (written 1211). The thirteenth-century *Pūjāvaliya* asserted that only kings 'who have right views' have rightful dynastic tenure: Strathern 2007a: 147.

[239] Reynolds and Hallisey 1989: 15–18. This process bears analogy with Pollock's account of a shift from a Sanskrit-dominated ecumene to vernacularisation.

[240] Strathern 2009: 841–6.

[241] Blackburn 2015a; 2015b; Frasch 2017.

[242] Berkwitz 2012: 230–3. That mélange included Pali-oriented Buddhism, hence Vijayabāhu I's importation of lineage noted above. But Gornall (2020: 212–9) notes that while there is evidence of Lankan texts circulating in Myanmar in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, there is no evidence of the reverse movement.

enthusiasm too.[243] The Lankan tradition brought a model of doctrinal unity and unimpeachable moral authority to royal courts – analogous to the appeal of monotheism in other regions – and Sri Lanka long remained as an authenticating source of Buddhism in the regional imagination.[244] This was a Buddhism that lent itself to becoming 'established', in both senses of the term: that is to say, enjoying a definitive relationship with the state and penetrating into mass society.[245]

In practice, it must always be reiterated, this form of Buddhism incorporated and lived alongside very important forms of immanentist thought and practice, and these societies remained open to the circulation of broader Indic traditions and literatures, which the term 'Theravada' rather obscures.[246] Nevertheless, if Buddhism is always an element that must bind with other traditions in order to form a sustainable religious field, in the case of the Theravada variant, these other traditions, such as Brahmanic court ritual or astrological expertise, were pressed into the service of essentially immanentist functions – while the soteriological dimension was reserved for its own authority. The possession of Buddhist relics, combining righteous authority and immanentist power, became a principal legitimating attribute of kingship.[247] Across these societies, monks enjoyed very high status, and monastic education began to raise literacy rates across the male population.

While, in the maritime world, the relevant political communities were more dominated by merchant classes with seaborne connections, the major polities of the mainland were more likely to be dominated by elites exercising control of land and labour. There are, of course, abundant reasons not to draw the distinction severely, and this book has underlined how important seaborne trade was across many different geographies in Asia.[248] In particular, the Ayutthaya chapters

[243] Asch 2014; Blackburn 2017: 74; Baker and Pasuk 2020: 37–9.
[244] Walters 2000: 146.
[245] Reid 2010: 459 refers to 'the capacity of the Buddhist monkhood (*sangha*) to create strong popular loyalties beyond anything known to the Hindu-influenced animist worlds of the islands', contrasting mainland and maritime regions.
[246] Holt 1991. Sanskrit literary traditions and technical genres were especially important.
[247] Gornall 2020: 168–89; Compare Ladwig 2015 on present-day Laos.
[248] Subrahmanyam 1993a: 12–29.

underscored how vital the mercantilist currents of the Indian Ocean were to political developments and office holders there too. But it also revealed the continuing importance of the control of manpower, ultimately linked to the products of the land, such that ties of patronage and even ideological sentiment with the broader population could prove decisive in determining legitimacy.

Yet, as ever, smaller polities, quarrelling with neighbours, facing internal fragmentation or more exposed seaborne flows, were much more likely to be sucked deep into games of religious diplomacy. This was overwhelmingly the paradigm within which some rulers and princes in sixteenth-century Sri Lanka engaged with Christianity in the sixteenth century, and which I have analysed at great length elsewhere.[249] The promise of Portuguese military support and trading connections exerted an increasingly strong magnetic pull on the fissiparous and rivalrous players in the 'solar politics' of the island from the 1540s with the arrival of reformed Franciscan friars. While the *cakravarti* based in the city of Kōṭṭe, Bhuvanekabāhu VII (r. 1521–1551), adamantly refused to convert, subordinate princes such as the King of Kandy in the highlands or, more frequently, lesser scions excluded from succession offered up their baptism in the hope of political reciprocity. Yet, the baptism of Jayavīra of Kandy (r. 1511–1552) in 1546, for example, was a blatantly superficial affair. He warned the friar conducting it that it must be conducted in secrecy 'so that his [people] would not kill him'.[250] When the secret leaked out, his subjects broke out into rioting and to quieten them he had to spread the message that it had been a mere ruse to deceive the Portuguese.[251] One sign, perhaps, of how firmly all this stayed in the realm of essentially secular machinations is that we have no record of any claim of immanent power involved in any of these decisions.[252] Bhuvanekabāhu's young successor, Dharmapāla, was baptised in 1557 amidst military

[249] Strathern 2007a.

[250] Schurhammer and Voretzsch 1928: 421. Compare Queyroz 1992: 702: 'But as these pagan princes are only moved by self-interest, when that ceases, there ceases also the desire they manifest of becoming Christians.'

[251] Perniola 1989–1991, I: 152–3.

[252] Miracle stories about the burial of the baptised prince Jugo of Kotte (Schurhammer and Voretzsch, eds. 1928: 202–4) did emerge, but this was not a conversion event. For a mild hint that Portuguese advertised divine power to a minor chief in Batticaloa: Schurhammer and Voretzsch 1928: 431. See Strathern 2007a: 106, 157.

desperation in the face of the aggressive expansion of Sītāvaka, but his failure to enact the role of Buddhist kingship did great damage to his authority, and many vassals leached away to his rival.[253] A generation later, the demotic war poem *Sītāvaka Haṭana* would castigate the Kōṭṭe kings for their association with the Portuguese by which 'the religion (*sāsana*) was destroyed'.[254] No Christian monarchy – at any level of integrity – lasted longer than a generation. When the Dutch began to interfere in the throne of Kandy in the mid-eighteenth century, they considered that as Christian rulers they would be unwelcome, but they could implant a Buddhist prince from Ayutthaya as the Sinhalese 'would gladly offer life and limb to protect the Buddhist teachings'.[255] This recapitulates the story of Sri Lanka's earlier encounter with Islam, which could not translate its mercantile dominance in the Indian Ocean into royal authority in the island.[256]

Turning to Cambodia, the Ayutthaya chapters underlined the enduring importance of a Brahmanic vision and ritualisation of kingship issuing in part from the Angkorean legacy. But by the sixteenth century, Theravada Buddhism had become entrenched in Cambodia too.[257] The first European missionary to travel to Cambodia was the Dominican friar Gaspar da Cruz, who visited the capital Longvek in 1555–1556 and was taken to be a practitioner of magic (the fate of so many missionaries) by King Ang Chan (1516–1566). Failing to make converts and moved to diagnose the reasons, he notes two great hindrances to his mission. First, the great power of Brahmin ritualists at court, for 'the Bramenes are the most difficult people to convert, since they are very attached to their rites and idolatries', who turned

[253] Strathern 2007a: 104–9, 156–73; *Sītāvaka Haṭana* (Paranavitana 1999) verses 370–4. Fernão de Queyroz (1992: 522–3) tells us that Dharmapala bore 'with great patience the commotions of his lieges *due in great measure to his change of religion*' (italics added). Dharmapala did endure, however, as a Christian monarch and even experienced a renaissance of legitimacy amidst the chaos of the 1590s; see Strathern 2007a: 194–210.

[254] Paranavitana 1999, verse 350–2.

[255] SLNA 1/4873, Secret letter, Batavia to Van Eck, 6 August 1762 (thanks to Dries Lyna and Shamara Wettimuny).

[256] Folk consciousness of the illegitimacy of Muslim sovereignty is expressed in the legends around the Galebandara cult about a thirteenth-century ruler who supposedly converted to Islam, though the date when these themes developed is unclear. Silva 2022.

[257] Harris 2005: 26–48; Chandler 2000: 75.

the king against him.[258] Second, he notes how extraordinarily revered the Buddhist monks were among the masses, of whom in fact they represented a considerable proportion: 'The common people have a great confidence in them, with a great reverence and worship: such that there is no person that dare contradict them in anything, and their words among them are held as so sacred, that in no wise will they endure to be gainsaid.' If his preaching was going well, all that had to happen was for one of 'these "priests" to turn up and say, '"This is good, but ours is better," they would all depart and leave me alone.'

Yet by the end of the century, the Khmer polity was notably vulnerable to its neighbours, and it thus became open to the agency of maritime mercantilist monotheists in the way that is familiar from Sri Lanka and Maritime Southeast Asia. Ambitious contenders were therefore induced to prioritise short-term advantage over longer-term legitimacy. King Sattha I, suffering greatly at the hands of his neighbours in the 1590s, was prepared to show interest in Christianity in order to attract Spanish military support and was briefly followed by a Christianising puppet, Barom Reachea II, imposed by Iberian arms and then undone by them: He was assassinated after they were defeated in battle.[259] In the seventeenth century, the Khmer state necessarily took on a similarly extraverted character to Ayutthaya, sucking in Chinese, Japanese Christians, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese, and Malay and Cham Muslims. But here these forces acquired an even more fundamental political significance. Amidst growing Dutch and Muslim rivalry, when Chao Ponhea Cand (Reameathipadei I, 1642–1658) violently usurped the throne in 1642, he soon after embraced Islam, becoming Sultan Ibrahim and establishing a replica of a Malay court.[260] Although there are doubts over the dating and reliability of the Cambodian royal chronicle tradition, it intriguingly agrees with Jesuit reports issuing in Giovanni Filippo de Marini's text of 1663 that promises of immanent power played a role

[258] Fr. Gaspar da Cruz in Boxer, ed. 2010: 60–2, who presents the king *as* a Brahmin, probably reflecting how deeply his role was shaped by Brahmanic ritual.

[259] Klages 2007; Trindade 1962–1967, III: 465–9; Briggs 1950: 147–58; Subrahmanyam 1990: 147.

[260] Reid 1993a: 189; 2015b: 101; Lieberman 2003: 282–3 for context.

in his conversion.[261] More strikingly, these sources confirm the sense from contemporary Dutch accounts that gaining Malay and Javanese military and commercial backing was vital to his decision to convert – but that this cost him support among his Khmer subjects.[262] In 1658, two of his cousins raised a large army against him, also combining with Cochinchinese forces. It is true that his reign lasted fifteen years, but the manner of its end is significant.[263] A Dutch letter from March of that year indicated that he could only rely on his Malay allies in response to the attack.[264] He was dethroned and his successors re-established Buddhism. Just as in Sri Lanka, the monotheistic experiment did not last longer than a single reign. This is at least consistent with the sense that Chao Ponhea Cand had forfeited some legitimacy among both his Buddhist subjects and the wider Buddhist ecumene.[265]

Elsewhere, and when diplomatic advantage was not a matter of life and death, ruler conversions were simply not on the cards. As the MEP missionary Lambert put it in 1670,

> The royalty of Siam as well also those of Pegu, Laos, Cambodia are more resistant to receiving the gospel, incredibly greater than the others from being extraordinarily attached to the cult of the idols and full of their priests who have an extreme credit with the mind of these kings and of their peoples.[266]

And not just the kings. In the 1680s, Fernão de Queyroz argued that the Portuguese found winning souls so hard in Asia because the Devil

[261] Polenghi 2007: 31 ('From that moment on, he would enjoy so much celestial protection, that he would have had no more difficulties [in his life]'); Kersten 2006: 14–15.

[262] Kersten 2006: 14, 18–19. De Marini's *Delle Missioni* . . . (1663; Polenghi 2007: 12) claims that 'it was the Malays who ruled, gave advice, directed all most important affairs of the kingdom [of Cambodia]'. Malay sources also assert the relevance of karmic anxieties over his bloody ascent.

[263] As Reid 1993a: 190 notes, this makes his reign longer than many Buddhist predecessors in this turbulent period.

[264] Kersten 2006: 20.

[265] Reid 1993a: 190, quoting the *Chroniques royales du Cambodge*: 'The dignitaries and the great mandarins as well as the ordinary people had no desire or love for a king who strayed from the path and entered the Muslim religion and ceased to take into account the Buddhist faith.' However, this manuscript tradition was compiled in the nineteenth/early-twentieth century, and its reliability is obviously doubtful (Kersten 2006: 4, 15). The king may have tried to mitigate his legitimacy deficit by making some gestures of Buddhist patronage (Harrison and Jackson, eds. 2010: 42; Kersten 2006: 20).

[266] Forest 1998, III: 363.

kept it in his thrall through two most obstinate sects – that of the Brahmins and that of Buddha.[267] It is important to note that he recognises quite clearly the commonality of all Buddhist traditions, from the 'Lamazes' of Tartary to the 'Bonzes' of China and Japan, and observes that 'as the Religious of this Sect have a great reputation outside China, it is a very difficult matter to convert any of his sectaries'.[268] Buddhists, he was forced to conclude, were a fore-doomed people.[269] And yet he has already conceded that China is a somewhat different case and he notes too that Japan is an exception to his rule. He therefore underlines that this intransigence has been *especially* the experience 'in the Kingdoms of Arracan, Pegu, Siam, Laos, and others of lesser name'.[270] This is an evocation of the Theravada tradition in all but name. Indeed, even as missionaries of this era came to grasp the overall coherence to Buddhism, they tended to describe Theravada monks as 'talapoins' and East Asian or Mahayana monks as 'bonzes'.[271] Queyroz was writing after 130 or 140 years of Jesuit activity in Asia and the tortured evolution of missionary understandings of its diverse and ancient traditions. This was knowledge of the enemy hard-won from the battlefield: The Portuguese had first erupted into Asia with an undiscriminating and rather empty category of 'gentiles' ('*gentios*') for all those who were not Christians, Muslims or Jews.[272]

The Ayutthaya chapters, in this sense, do stand in for the Theravada world more generally. As Alberts put it, 'In their own way, then the Siamese were depicted as being as intransigent as Muslims in resisting Catholicism.'[273] In the mid-nineteenth century, John Bowring reported, 'It must be acknowledged – and, indeed the fact is not denied by the missionaries themselves – that, as far as the Siamese are concerned, the labours alike of Catholics and Protestants for their

[267] Queyroz 1992: 699–700 (also noting that Muslim kingdoms prevented preaching).
[268] Queyroz 1992: 141. [269] Queyroz 1992: 115.
[270] Queyroz 1992: 141, 660. There is no space to explore the case of Arakan, where the dynasty developed an unusual ritual chameleon strategy deploying both Muslim and Buddhist legitimation strategies. Several developments there, including Portuguese attempts to use Christianised princes, are comparable to those in Sri Lanka: Charney 1999 and Subrahmanyam 1993b.
[271] Queyroz 1992: 140; Forest 1998, III: 260; Lopez 2013: 80.
[272] Subrahmanyam 2017: 103. [273] Alberts 2013a: 64.

conversion have been almost or altogether fruitless.'[274] One might have thought that the inducements of modernity – education, medicine, literacy – would have lent credibility to the missionary message in the region, as they did so strongly in other parts of the world, but in fact no such transference of prestige occurred. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Thailand in 1991 as well as Axial theory, Erik Cohen observed, 'It follows that the closer a Thai is to philosophical Buddhism, the more difficult it will be to convert him to Christianity. This supposition has, indeed, been unanimously confirmed by Protestant missionaries in my interviews.'[275] That is to say, the most successful missions of all in Thailand were among the 'animist' hill tribes; the Chinese Mahayana Buddhists were easier to convert than Theravada adherents; while among the latter, more likely to convert were those 'whose religious beliefs and practices contain a strong animistic element,' such as the northern Thai peasantry.

Conclusion

We are at particularly paradoxical moment in the question of what to do with 'culture'.[276] On the one hand, there are many impulses insisting upon its fundamental importance as a means of understanding patterns of human behaviour: the decolonial desire to relativise hegemonic traditions of thought as merely Western rather than universal and to insist therefore upon our capacity to separate out inherently distinct thought-worlds, the liberal desire to celebrate multicultural societies, the 'ontological turn' in anthropology recognising incommensurable ways of being in the world, a widespread scholarly aversion towards materialist and biological reductionism, or even (appealing to a quite different sensibility) work in the cultural evolutionary vein that is starting to accumulate quantitative data substantiating forms of cultural difference on the psychological level.[277] On the other hand, mapping out the borders of 'cultures' and assigning them causal weight is often regarded askance due to concerns about

[274] Bowring 1857, I: 336.
[275] Cohen 1991: 129. Also compare Keyes 1993: 262; Tarling, ed. 1999, pt. 2: 181–3.
[276] We have been for a long time; a vast literature could be summoned. For example, Kuper 1999.
[277] Henrich 2020.

essentialisation, a post-structuralist and post-colonial mood of epistemological scepticism, the desire to deconstruct nationalist or faith-based assumptions, an understanding of the multiple perspectives and power struggles internal to any one society, and a very contemporary awareness of the globalising flows that characterise our present age by apparently trampling over all such boundaries. Therefore, across much of history and anthropology it has become far more comfortable to explore cultural co-minglings, networks, boundary-crossings, pluralism, cosmopolitanism. In short, cultures remain at once critical – and yet curiously indefinable. We are only really happy if we can watch them in flow.

Not surprisingly, therefore, scholarship of the past generation or two has frequently reminded us of the dangers in deploying such abstractions as 'Christianity', 'monotheism', 'Buddhism', 'Theravada Buddhism'. For a great many scholarly tasks, there are, of course, very good reasons for this caution. Less often noted, perhaps, are the drawbacks that emerge when other scholarly tasks lie before us, including the failure to achieve an analytical grip on where and why religious difference matters. For any appreciation of religious diversity amounts to the drawing of a boundary between this group and that group, and this in turn can only rest upon some manner of generalisation. It is only thus that we can properly allow cultural revolutions to matter as much as industrial ones, to see the notions of salvation as agentive as the motions of predation.

It is vital to appreciate that these boundaries will need to be drawn in different ways depending on the question at hand. Working at a particularly large scale – say that of Christendom or the Islamic world – may appear to invite the concept of 'civilisation' to the table, a notably unwelcome guest for many scholars in the humanities today.[278] Talk of ecumenes or cultural macro-regions is apparently more acceptable, as are references to more particular diffusions such as Marshall Hodgson's 'Islamicate' world. Sheldon Pollock, delineating the vast reach of the Sanskrit imaginaire, preferred the term 'cosmopolis', a

[278] Older terms frequently seen as problematic include *kulturkreise* (culture circles) and 'Great Traditions'. Subrahmanyam 2016 notes the misuse of civilisation concepts, while Halbmayer 2017, Arnason and Hann, eds. 2018 consider their advantages as well as disadvantages. Note that taking religion as the definitive feature of a culture area may be more apt when religious change itself is the analytical target.

term rapidly finding broad application in other contexts, precisely because we do, after all, need some way to identify coherent and enduring cultural patterns that stretch across far larger expanses of the world than a single state or society. It matters less than is often supposed what term we use for these patterns. It is only important that we see our chosen category as a heuristic designed for a particular task, rather than imagining discrete blocs each defined in toto by a master concept. Hence for many purposes it would be extremely unhelpful to reduce China to a 'Confucian' paradigm, and not only because that term hides many important transformations, contested philosophical visions and ritual practices but because China's religious history was driven by an oscillating relationship with nomadic Inner Asian cultures, massive and diverse Buddhist influences, the evolution of Daoist salvationism and Daoist immanentism, and the persistence of myriad local forms of spirit worship . . . while in its fifteenth-century projection of influence into maritime Southeast Asia, Chinese imperial might acted as a vector of Islam![279] Nevertheless, if we tried to understand the way in which imperial power in China was conceived in religio-philosophical terms over the long term, it would be pointless to attempt it without understanding the extraordinarily durable set of traditions that we have labelled, for convenience, 'Confucianism'. Equally, we do not need to choose whether Ayutthaya belonged to a Theravada Buddhist ecumene, a broader Buddhist one, an Angkorean culture of sacred kingship, a Sanskrit cosmopolis, a Chinese tributary sphere or a Persian diasporic zone – for it participated in all of them. But that does not stop us from recognising that Theravada Buddhism formed a foundational and hegemonic element of the configuration of authority, that this was critical in determining its relationship with incoming monotheisms and that this makes it comparable to other Theravada polities elsewhere.

Meanwhile the concept of immanentism cuts across all received cultural or civilisational metageographies. This is one of several ways in which the approach taken here refuses the sovereignty of culture.[280] If only for the unsurpassed diversity 'immanentism' encompasses at the religious level – not to mention the vast array of non-religious factors

[279] Wade 2012; Wain 2017. China has been treated from diverse perspectives in this book and in *UP* (which largely focussed on its immanentist features, e.g.).

[280] Compare Herbjørnsrud 2021.

in play – it is hardly surprising that it cannot be used as the basis of a *law* of ruler conversion as such. Missionaries did not merely have to turn up at the courts of such societies for their rulers to fall headlong into the pulpit. Many of the immanentist societies of sub-Saharan Africa remained unimpressed in the face of the exertions of Catholic missionaries in the early modern period. For that matter, nor does the mere touch of an Indic transcendentalism immunise royal courts from monotheism as the Islamisation of Maritime Southeast Asia indicates.[281] (The only principle approaching a law-like status is the apparently complete inability of Christian and Muslim rulers to convert and retain hold of the throne.)[282] And, naturally, in analysing any one case, a host of particularities will hove into analytical consideration. How successfully will a young high chief manage his drunkenness on the ritual performance of his accession? Such details, here the case of Liholiho in Hawaii in 1819, matter too.

Yet as we shift from specific cases to regional overviews and then to a long-term global perspective, at each point our explanatory frameworks must shift in nature, and at a certain level we can begin to notice that, while laws do not appear, certain patterns surely do. It is vital to recognise *how much difference the scale of perspective makes*. It is extraordinary how consistently the question of scale trips up the dialogue between globalists and specialists.[283] It then becomes clear that in situations where Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or Confucianism have become societally 'established', Christianity tended to precipitate movements towards royal conversion only in situations of existential jeopardy. Naturally, even in these regions, disinherited princes with nothing to lose were liable to make radical gambles in the game of religious diplomacy. But where this happened, it was often a superficial, abortive or temporary move, anticipating or precipitating a decisive backlash. Only in Japan, for a while, did some rulers actually set in motion more profound forms of religious transformation before political unification ensured that Asian transcendentalisms would reassert control.

Turning from ruler conversions to the populace at large before the twentieth century – across these parts of Asia that were not conquered

[281] See pp. 389–92 above as to why, including the way that Indic traditions remained relatively un-'established'.
[282] There may yet be examples I have not come across.
[283] See the perceptive comments of McKeown 2012.

by European powers – Christianity found some success among Mahayana Buddhist/Confucian regions and low-caste Hindus, albeit never in numbers that threatened the majority. While among Theravada Buddhists rulers and populace alike were left un-moved.

No substantial attempt has been made here to extend these arguments to populations conquered by monotheistic powers, given that the calculus of motivations would be rather different under these conditions. Yet, a cursory overview would suggest that some of these patterns do still retain some visibility: Recall the firm intransigence of Muslims everywhere under Christian rule; the survival of very large Christian, Jewish and Hindu populations under Muslim rule; **and the overwhelming persistence of Hinduism under Islamic rule**.[284] Even if we switch to the most expansive perspective possible – a much vaster canvas than this book has been able to address in any significant way – and consider conversion by all social actors in all political and temporal contexts up to the present day, there are certain ways in which patterns become more visible still. The so-called folk religions entered into a precipitous decline in the twentieth century. Africa has been swept securely into the arms of Christianity and Islam and is now frequently seen as a heartland of the Christian faith.[285] Papua New Guinea became 99.2 per cent Christian in a few generations.[286] By contrast, Theravada Buddhist societies have largely continued their resistance to monotheism. Mahayana Buddhist–Confucian populations have been somewhat more open, playing host to some genuine mass Christian movements – most striking in the rapid growth of Christianity in South Korea from the 1960s onwards.[287] The general resurgence of religious exploration in China has led to a rapidly growing Christian movement there even if the Pew survey registers Christians as only 5.1 per cent of the population

[284] See above. Some 90 per cent of Balkans subjects remained Christian: Lieberman MS, chap. 3.

[285] Between 1900 and 2020, the proportion of Africans who were Christian rose from 9 per cent to 49 per cent, while 'Ethno-religions' fell from 58 per cent to 8 per cent. Seabright 2024: 49, drawing on the World Religion Database.

[286] https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/12/globalReligion-tables.pdf.

[287] By 2010, Christians were 29.4 per cent (and Buddhists 22.9 per cent) of the population of Korea, now a major exporter of missionaries itself. https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/12/globalReligion-tables.pdf; Lindenfeld 2021: 252. However, Christian growth seems to have stalled as the young cleave more towards a secularisation pattern: https://www.rfi.fr/en/20180530-Christian-churches-decline-South-Korea.

(equating to well over one million).[288] Hindus still make up 79.5 per cent of the Indian population and have hardly been reluctant to assert their tradition against their Abrahamic rivals. All this, of course, leaves to one side the dynamics of secularisation – a story for another occasion – and the Pew figures surely underestimate how widespread the religiously unaffiliated are in some regions.[289] But in terms of those who do retain a religious commitment, it is clear that the world now consists of a great ring of monotheism, occupying all the lands that were once given over to immanentism, around a large Asian core that preserves the legacy of the other great Axial traditions.

[288] Stanley 2018: 58 notes a remarkable conversion dynamic from 1900–1949, leading to roughly four million Christians.

[289] The Pew chart has the UK at 71.1 per cent Christian. Weekly church attendance in the UK in 2010 has been calculated at 6.6 per cent of the population: Field 2022: 100.

Appendix:
A Note on the Religious Typology in Relation to Gender and in Relation to Violence

Since *Unearthly Powers* was written, two further ways in which the distinction between immanentism and transcendentalism may work have suggested themselves, relating to gender and religious violence. These themes are not fully worked out here, by any means, but are noted as potential avenues for future consideration. The notion has long been current that the world religions acted as engines of patriarchy as they replaced or dominated local religions that had allowed women greater opportunities to achieve status as ritual specialists. There is a daunting literature to this issue that cannot be engaged here.[1] But we may simply observe that all of the religious and philosophical traditions emerging out of the Axial Age do seem to have reserved religious authority for men (with the important exception of female monastics, and some saints and visionaries in Christianity) and raise the question of what the logic of this might be.[2] Perhaps the principal context here is simply that these traditions all emerged, not coincidentally, in regions where agriculture had long been practised and populations had become settled, urbanised and ruled by states – and these conditions seem very broadly inimical to matricentric societal arrangements over the course of world history.[3] We might

[1] By no means can immanentism be associated with matriarchy, nor even with matricentrism. Matricentrism includes matrilineal and matrilocal reproductive practices – neither of which necessarily entails greater female power and status. On the myth of matriarchy: M. Strathern 1995. Nor does the presence of important female metapersons entail greater female access to ritual specialist roles. In stateless immanentist societies men may well dominate cults to female deities; see Gardner 1988 and, for limitations when women assume leadership roles, Macintyre 1988.

[2] These traditions are referred to as 'Axial' here so as to comfortably include Confucianism, firmly patriarchal.

[3] Kent 2020: 8. Duindam 2022 has a helpful overview of literature on the link between changing material, ecological factors and gender relations, and offers a qualified endorsement of the way that matricentric forms were more predominant in earlier history and their gradual decline over time.

imagine, therefore, that various features of patriarchy were simply inherited by religions like Christianity or Buddhism from this broader setting. Moreover, central to any answer will be the way that these traditions developed into formidable hierarchical institutions, for where opportunities to grab property, power and prestige emerge, men have tended to grab them disproportionally.[4] The world religions provided a mechanism by which religious activity could be controlled and social life disciplined more generally, and these were turned to serve patriarchal purposes. Still, it is worth considering whether any lines of connection could be strung to the more intrinsic elements of transcendentalism. To be sure, these might point in opposing directions, for there were potential elements of transcendentalism, its counter-cultural offensiveness, its egalitarian erosion of ascriptive categories, that could generate new opportunities for women.[5] Barbara Watson Andaya has argued that female agency may have been underplayed in explaining why Theravada Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were adopted across early modern Southeast Asia – even as she concludes that in the end 'the expansion of the world religions substantially reduced female opportunities to gain status as communicators with the supernatural'.[6] Other potential features of transcendentalism – a certain disgust at the nature of the embodied life, the problematisation of sexuality in Christianity in particular, and to a lesser extent Buddhism – surely opened up a space in which misogynistic instincts could take root.[7]

The case of Hawaii, examined in Chapters 7 and 8 above, offers a certain ambivalence on this matter. The capacity of immanentism to hold aloft female metapersons for veneration and recognize female interlocuters with metapersons is most evident in the power and indeed violence of the volcano goddess Pele and the agency of her prophetesses. It is even fitting that the goddess and her mouthpieces appear to have played an important role in resisting the formation of a Christianising new order in the early 1820s. More striking still, however, is that the new order appears to have been driven most determinedly by the will of female chiefs, whose capacity to exert agency in

[4] Kent 2020: 29; King 2006: 79 notes that 'during the formative period of a religion, women often play a leading role or are closely associated with the work of a religious founder, whereas in subsequent developments they are relegated to the background and lose much of their independent agency'.

[5] Arguably most consequential in moments before the union with state power.

[6] Andaya 2006: 73.

[7] Kent 2020: 33, 41.

this regard was testimony to the power and status that high-ranking women could attain in Hawaiian society. And yet, ironically, it was the exclusion of women from the climatic rites of human sacrifice of the state cult that may have pushed these chiefs towards abandoning it and eventually embracing Christianity.

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How the model may help in understanding patterns of religious violence has been considered in more detail elsewhere.[8] The point is not to claim that immanentism or transcendentalism entails different propensities for violence, only that they drive and shape it in different ways. In immanentism, just as settling human affairs may require violence, so metapersons also may demand violent action. This occurs most strikingly in the minority of immanentist societies that practised ritual homicide. But even wars impelled in part by the need for sacrificial victims, as undertaken by the early-sixteenth-century Mexica, were not wars in the name of 'a religion' (these are the religions with no name, after all); they merely arose out of a sphere of social relations that happened to include metapersons. There was a kind of morality involved, but it was one oriented to the tangible this-worldly fortunes of the particular society in question rather than one rooted in a universal ethics. More generally, immanentism was an essential means of achieving almost *any* social-political outcome, including conflict resolution and peaceful trade. It was not premised on the falsity or malignancy of other peoples' gods.

The relationship between transcendentalism and violence, by contrast, was framed by a striking paradox. As universal ethical systems preaching a version of the 'golden rule' and inducting their adherents into infinitely extendable moral communities, violence was profoundly problematised. It is no coincidence that blood sacrifice was essentially anathema while human sacrifice was simply unthinkable, nor that the virtuosos of this new ethos were renouncers and monastics who lived out the practice of non-violence.[9] Now that their teachings were bound

[8] Strathern 2022a.

[9] One qualification is the sacrifice of a ram in Eid al-Adha in Muslim practice, although this is meant to signify the dedication to the will of God exhibited by Abraham and may be considered a marker of the 'end of sacrifice', in the sense proposed by Stroumsa 2009. Thanks to Azfar Moin and Blake Pye.

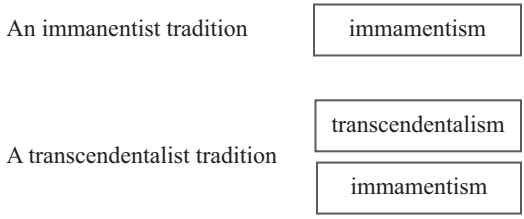
up in texts and subject to waves of scholarly rationalisation, the conduct of war became the subject of explicit just war theory. Yet all this might only serve to legitimise violence all the more profoundly. For all transcendentalisms are founded upon a utopian vision that might easily exalt the imperative of salvation over the need to avoid bodily pain and suffering. This was much more significantly a feature of the monotheistic variants, of course. Thus wars could be launched in the name of Christianity and Islam, against those within or without who failed to abide by the founding revelations or appeared to pervert them. The narratives of higher purpose called people to war even as they reprehended violence. It is worth noting that, as a tool for redescribing what counts as legitimate violence, transcendentalism is also, in a sense, a tool for making the state itself, if we choose to use Max Weber's classic definition of the latter.

Glossary of Theoretical Terms

The Foundational Concepts of Religion

Immanentism – a form of religiosity oriented towards the presence of supernatural forces and agents in the world around us, which are attributed with the power to help or thwart human aspirations. It is found in every society and religious system and is defined here by ten features. An *immanentist tradition* or system is solely defined by immanentism.

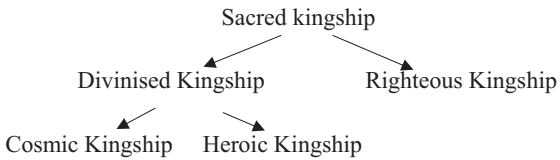
Transcendentalism – a form of religiosity oriented towards the transcendence of mundane existence and the imperative of salvation or liberation from the human condition. It is characterised here by fifteen features. A *transcendentalist tradition* is one in which transcendentalism has achieved a certain hegemony, albeit always in dialogue with immanentism – as in Buddhism or Christianity.



The Foundational Concepts of Kingship

Cosmic Kingship – a form of divinised kingship that makes the king a crucial intermediary between human society and the divine forces that govern its affairs, ensuring the reproduction of order and

	flourishing. It is revealed through ritual performance.
Divinised Kingship	– kings are divinised when they are regarded as godlike and treated as if they were metapersons. As the mode of ruler sacralisation promoted by immanentist religiosity, it locates that sacrality in the being and capacities of the ruler.
Heroic Kingship	– a form of divinised kingship that focuses on the inherent supernatural power or charisma of the ruler, and which is revealed through observable achievements, especially on the battlefield.
Righteous Kingship	– kings are righteous when they are idealised in moral terms and assigned a special role in the quest for salvation. As the mode of ruler sacralisation promoted by transcendentalist religiosity, it locates that sacrality in his or her relationship with the imperatives of a transcendentalist tradition.
Sacred Kingship	– any form of kingship conceived, performed and legitimised in terms of immanentism and/or transcendentalism. It is therefore an umbrella term encompassing both divinised and righteous kingship.



Type:	**Heroic**	**Cosmic**
Achieved through:	Deeds	Ritual
Relation to society:	Exposed	Isolated
Achieves:	Status	Legitimacy
Stability:	Brief	Enduring
Archetypal Location	Battlefield	Palace
Normativity:	Transgressive	Ordered

Further Concepts Defined

Auto-iconoclasm	– occurs when people destroy the ritual objects and images they had previously held as sacred in a way that is consistent with the internal assumptions of their own religious tradition, as when a collective understanding emerges that the metapersons invoked by the objects have become useless or malevolent.
Charisma	– the social power available to individuals who are attributed with supernatural qualities and potencies, especially where these are revealed through heroic accomplishment.
Conceptual Control	– the capacity of a religious group or tradition to maintain control over the terms in which the success or failure of ritual activity is interpreted, such that unwanted outcomes do not cast doubt on the efficacy of that activity.
Consolidation	– the process by which the ruler or the state gains control over religious activity, centralising and instrumentalising its social power.
Diarchy	– occurs when kingship is split into two offices, usually where one takes on a more active role and the other a more ritualised role (or the heroic and cosmic roles).
Durkheimian	– evokes a long tradition of the interpretation of religion expressed most completely by Emile Durkheim, in which the capacity of religion to produce social order and cohesion is emphasised.
Economy of Ritual Efficacy	– evident in situations where the value of a religious practice is associated with its perceived efficacy, such that new rituals, ritual specialists, metapersons or entire systems may be adopted if they are perceived to be more effective than old ones.
Empirical Religiosity	– religious behaviour focussed on outcomes that are realised in – and therefore assessed in terms of – lived, observable reality.

Intellectualisation – the process by which a religious tradition is shaped by a class of high-status literate intellectuals, who value textual authority, systematisation, abstraction, self-reflexive thinking, offensiveness and debate.

Legitimation – the establishment of the mental, cultural and behavioural norms that allow power to be exercised with consent, such that it is assumed to be natural, inevitable, beneficial, moral, just, divinely sanctioned or soteriologically vital.

Mana – originally a Polynesian term, it is also used here to refer to supernatural potency or efficacy made immanent in the world.

Metapersons – supernatural agents who have some of the characteristics of people but are not present to the senses in the way that ordinary people are, and who have diverse powers to influence human well-being, for good or ill: ancestors, spirits, deities.

Moral community – a group that shares a common set of moral understandings, values and norms, and is conscious of doing so.

Non-Euphemised Kingship – a form of sacred kingship in which the amoral, violent, terrifying and transgressive dimensions to the exercise of power are expressed. It is allowed but not necessitated by immanentist religious systems.

Offensiveness – A tradition has an offensive quality when it is predicated on the existence of alternative worldviews, which it is oriented towards challenging. Ernest Gellner[1] saw it as a feature of 'ideology', but it is also a defining feature of transcendentalism.

Relativisation – the relegation of a given cultural feature or system to secondary importance through an awareness of its merely customary and contingent basis.

[1] Gellner 1979.

Righteous Iconoclasm	– the targeted destruction of religious sites and images in accordance with soteriological imperatives. It is usually a function of the monotheistic sensibility of abomination.
Ritualisation Trap	– occurs where the ritualisation and isolation of the ruler diminishes their political power and freedom.
Social Power	– the capacity to shape, cohere, motivate and discipline groups of people.
Soteriology	– relating to salvation or liberation.
State	– 'A coercion-wielding organisation that is distinct from household and kinship groups and that exercises priority over all other organisations within a substantial territory' (Charles Tilly).[2]
Supernatural	– refers to beings and forces that modern science does not recognise in its account of the natural world.
Supernatural Utopianism	– refers to visions of an imminent transformation of society through the agency of supernatural forces and beings, such that it is lifted into a permanent, idealised, utopic state. Exhibited by prophetic and cargo cults and also 'millenarian' movements (here reserved for transcendentalist variants).
Warrior Iconoclasm	– the targeted destruction of the religious sites and images of the enemy for both religious and political reasons. In immanentism it will often imply the subordination of enemy claims to supernatural power.

[2] Tilly 1990.

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